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HER MEMORY



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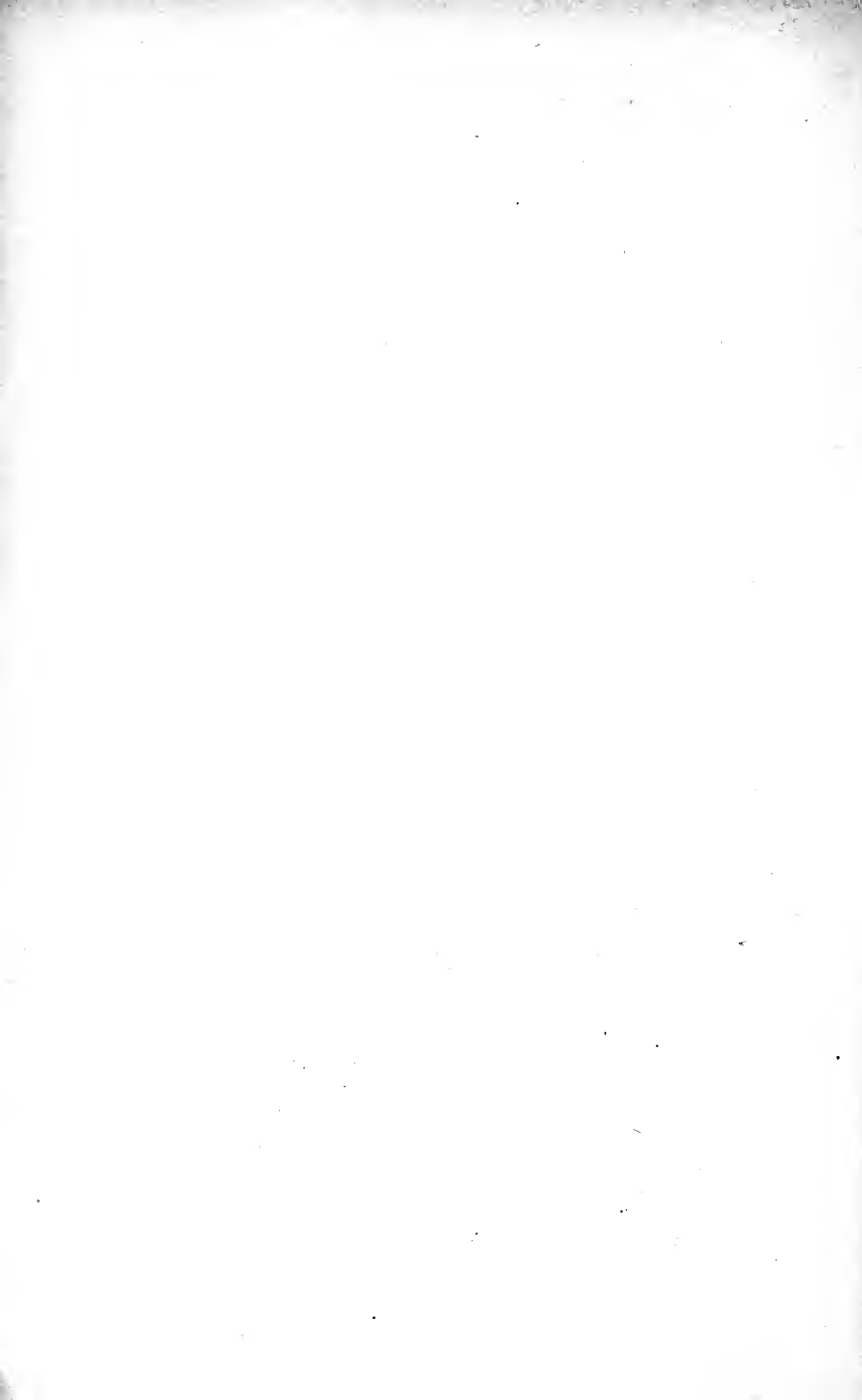
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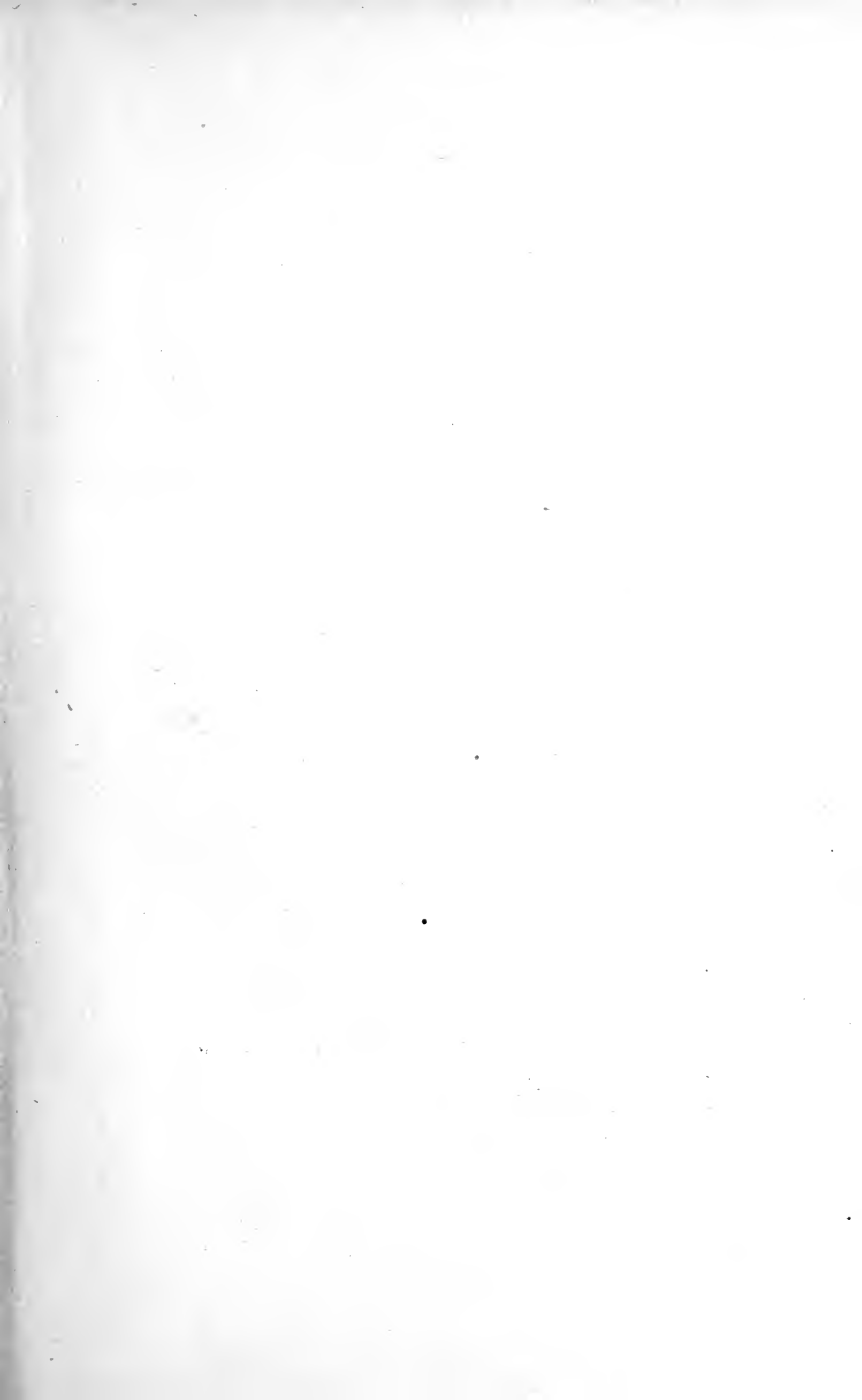
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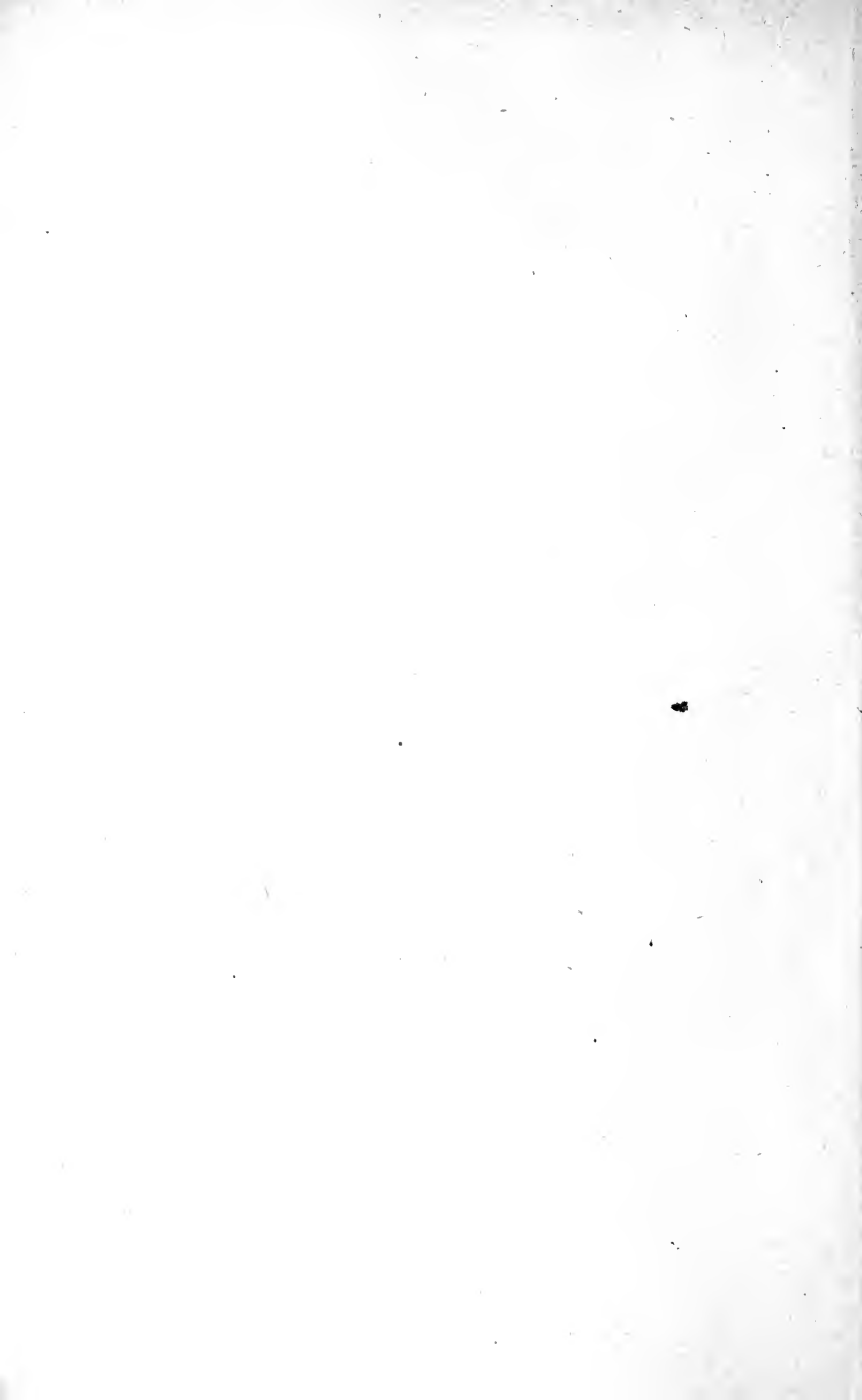
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HER MEMORY

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Maarten Maarten's

HER MEMORY

BY

MAARTEN MAARTENS

AUTHOR OF GOD'S FOOL, JOOST AVELINGH,
THE GREATER GLORY, ETC.



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1899

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HER MEMORY.

CHAPTER I.

SHE lay dying, in the silent summer evening—in the sunlit summer silence that seems alive with sound. The long shadows deepened round her, through the depths of tranquil sunset. The soft shadows, all around her, closing in upon the sunlight of her life.

He knew it. He sat beside the bed, his arms fallen between his knees, his face flung forward, intense with straining, as if to draw her back before she slipped away! During ten short years—a moment—she had filled his life with summer: she had been—she was—his sunrise: his day was young yet, young as hers—God, the day is brief enough, at best:

I

it doesn't end at noon! There are clouds enough at best, and mists across the morning—but, oh God, the sun must run his little course before he sinks into the sea!—she lay dying, in her early prime of womanhood: the stealthy shadows blackened on the whiteness of the room.

She opened her eyes, and looked at him. “Anthony,” she said, in a voice like that of a stranger, speaking very low and calm, “I want you to fetch her, please.”

He rose hastily and walked to the window, gazing out, seeing nothing. He rebelled against this inevitable desire of hers, the leave-taking from their only child. And he crept away, with laggard step, to the farther side of the house, and took the child's hand from her toys, and brought her.

In the grey death-chamber, by the bedside, the child stood solemn, accustomed of late to sickness, her little face accepting the sadness all around.

“Margaret,” said the father, “it is little Margaret.” The child wondered: none but her grandmother ever called her “Margaret.” The dying woman again unclosed her eyes, to more than their natural width. “Margaret,” she responded: the word sank like an echo in measureless abysses of passion. He saw, as she lay immovable upon the pillow, he saw all her soul well up towards them: for one moment he felt it blend with his and mingle as never in all their happy years of union—then, a terrible change came over the eyes: they broke: the child trembled under his hand, cried out: the doctor ran in! the nurse!—the room seemed full of people, of hideous, unbearable commotion—an immense cloud had fallen between him and the bustle round the bed.

He drew back, watching their busy movements, and the tumult of his impressions, as he watched, seethed down rapidly into a resolve to resist. “Doctor,” he said, “what are you

doing?" For the moment nobody answered him. "You are disturbing us," he continued angrily. "Mrs. Stollard wished to speak to me. She had sent for the child." The doctor turned from the bed, a rough man, uncouth. "She will never speak to you again, Mr. Stollard," he said.

The husband made one great stride forward. "Liar!" he said, and pushed back the meddling physician, not, certainly, intending to hurt him, pushed him back over a stool or a cushion, on to a couch. "Oh, Mr. Stollard, oh sir, come away!" exclaimed the sick nurse: he bent over the dead woman and suddenly lifted her high in the air. He faced them with his burden enwrapped in clinging linens: he saw, through the twilight, the vulgar, frightened expressions around him; he saw the child sobbing, half hidden in her nurse's lap. Without a word he passed from them, bearing his burden, through the door, and the long passage, downstairs.

The doctor sat up and brushed his arm.
“He knows she’s dead,” he said. “He
wouldn’t have moved her, if he hadn’t known
she was dead.”

CHAPTER II.

THE husband, erect and slow, directed his steps to a room which had lain unused for the last three weeks, his wife's. As he entered, his arms shook. There were flowers here—great masses—in vases, as usual: the gardener had gone his daily round; the machinery of the house moved on. The room looked horribly unaltered: he laid down the beautiful burden from his arms, on the familiar couch in the great bay window. And he turned quickly, to double-lock the door.

Seven years ago, that time she had sprained her ankle, he had carried her down like this, day by day, for a month. She was very young and lovely then. She was very lovely still. And young.

When, at last, he looked up from the musing into which he had fallen, on the low chair by her side, all shapes in the room were grown indistinct with dusk. He sprang to the window-curtains and tore them aside—tore them away, in sudden descents of dark drapery, feverishly anxious to see clearly, to distinguish each feature, to have light all about, full upon her—not this increasing darkness—light!

And as the remorseless gloom sank faster, he bent close, resting his hot cheek against her cold one, whispering her name. A fold of falling curtain had carried down with it a table full of knickknacks: he had not remarked the crash. But he noticed that a slip of linen had dropped away from the half-bared arm, and he gently drew it up again.

He realised nothing, reasoned about nothing, desired—for the moment—nothing, except, perhaps, that the advancing night should pause. When the room had grown

quite dark, with sultry summer darkness, he rose to his feet and lighted all the candles in a great porcelain chandelier overhead, lighted all the candles in numerous sconces and Dresden ornaments, against the mirrors and shiny hangings, went on lighting candles, that had never burnt in such abundance before—his hand so shaky that he knocked off bits of flowers and leaves from the brittle china—went on multiplying bright reflections, till the little rounded chamber, all pale silk and porcelain, shone, opalescent, like the inside of a shell. He could draw no blinds, for he had broken the cords: beyond the great window the blue night beat against the blaze. Somebody stealthily tried the door-handle. There were steps on the gravel outside, and once came the sound of carriage-wheels. Single stars crept forth above the distant wall of trees. A blackbird started its loud call, and stopped. Everything was still, expectant, holding its breath. He

only expected nothing, sitting watching in the yellow glare.

All through the night he sat thus, watching. The terrified domestics, alone with the sleeping child, whispered and stared at each other. Far adown the country-side shone the radiance from the terrace-window: the servants, peeping round a corner, discussed it under their breath, sore-troubled, delighted, amazed. The footman, who read books, vaguely mentioned "funereal pyres;" the women-servants thrilled responsive; the under-housemaid slipped upstairs, escorted, to fetch her ear-rings: old nurse brought down her charge, to an improvised bed in the breakfast-room.

They were all of them attached to their employers, within reasonable limits of menial devotion. Their master was an honourable man, a gentleman: they were honestly sorry for him, wondering what changes would come

to themselves, primarily nonplussed by this extravagant conduct to-night. "You must telegraph to Sir Henry," the doctor had said to the butler, as the two went stealing back from the boudoir door; "Sir Henry, I suppose, is in London: is he not?" The butler did not know: Mr. Stollard's elder brother so seldom came to Thurdles, the household hardly cared about his movements. "But I think," said the butler, cautiously, "that Stawell Court is closed." Stawell Court was the family seat, about seven miles away.

"Well, then, nothing remains but to send for Mrs. Fosby," said the doctor testily. "And a natural thing to do, she being the poor dead lady's mother. But I always prefer to have a man on the scene first. Women are no good, except for crying, a thing any one can do who is paid for it, as they understand in the East. Good-night!" He turned in the hall-door: "Do you want *me* for anything?" he asked.

The butler's family-pride rose within him, though he was not an old family servant. "I thank you, sir," he made answer, "no, I think we can manage, sir." And he went downstairs, feeling miserably forlorn, and responsible, with that great glare across the gravel road, and the barred door within the house, and all this helpless woe. "The doctor ain't no gentleman," he said to the other servants, "I shall send a messenger to Mrs. Fosby. You must find me a messenger, John." The servants detested their mistress's mother, but they would be eager to welcome her now.

"He said as he preferred a man—for to manage things," said the butler, with a grin. A shout went up, immediately suppressed. "She'd manage us alive or dead, 'd Mrs. Fosby," remarked the unthinking housemaid. "Lor', Adelaide, how can you!" squeaked cook. All the servants cried out upon Adelaide, who sat down, very red and sniffy, sev-

eral times repeating she should say anything she chose.

“It is absurd,” said Mrs. Fosby, on the doorstep next morning, in the clear light of the summer day. All the way up from the town, on whose farther side she lived, suburbanly, she had stared at the wan window that stared down at her. Now, having alighted from the fly, she had cautiously stared under cover of the rhododendrons. She could hardly steady her impatient foot, as she listened to Nurse Lintot’s lucubrations. “It is terribly sad, and my child is taken—taken from me:” her lip shook—“taken from us. Sad enough,—God knows!—without this very extraordinary complication. Lintot, this scandal must be stopped at once. By the bye, it was extravagant of Hawkin’ to send me a messenger. Stopped at once! Everybody will be talking in Rusborough. And what will the county say?”

"The Lord knows, ma'am," said Lintot sobbing.

"I do not," replied Mrs. Fosby emphatically. Without the remotest sense of having said anything incongruous she swept into the hall.

Mrs. Fosby was a good woman: it would be a great mistake to imagine she was not. An unlikely mistake, for she possessed a large store of such second-rate virtues as any average community is swift to recognise. Supremely respectable herself, she loved, honoured, and served respectability all the days of her common-place life. She had never done anything that any of her associates deemed wrong. She belonged to the upper middle class, for her husband had been able to "retire" from something substantial in the city; her religion was the Church of England, and her worship the stratum immediately above her. She had been "blessed," as she fully realised, in her only child, Margaret, who

had succeeded, with admirable tact, in leaving her mother's feelings unhurt, and her own uninjured, growing up pure and good, without giving or taking offence. Once only there threatened a fateful divergence, when Margaret refused her first suitor, a baronet, on the sands of Llandudno; but the baronet turned out a Mysterious Musician, and Mrs. Fosby ate humble pie. The girl herself, from whose gold her mother's gilding dropped harmless, unconsciously and innocently conformed in the temple of Rimmon, while busy with her own white thoughts and prayers. And the god Snob was merciful to her; or perhaps he is weary of virgin holocausts. Anthony Stollard fell in love with her and she with him. Anthony, who belonged not only to an old county family—every one in the country does that—but to a family mansion, a baronetcy (Victorian), and a handful of apocryphal pictures. Anthony was the happy possessor of a competency and moderate ill-

health. He was the unhappy possessor of an artistic temperament, and an adequate talent for painting. Had he been gifted with genius, his fortune would hardly have hampered him; had he been destitute of means, his art-love could have done him no harm. As it was, he painted, frequently with pains, and his pictures were taken by the Galleries, and the critics said they showed various most admirable qualities, and he gave them away to his friends.

When they married he was twenty-five and she was twenty. In his case, at any rate, there had been love at first sight. Their married life lasted through an almost cloudless decade. During ten years of that time he loved her for her beautiful face, during nine for her beautiful soul. He thought there was no better, fairer woman. He never looked at others. He painted sheep.

“It is absurd,” said Mrs. Fosby, sitting in

the breakfast-room, beside Margie's disordered bed. The old lady was dressed in temporary black, and looked very pale and stately. "As if we were not miserable enough already, without making ourselves ridiculous!" And Mrs. Fosby broke down, weeping womanly tears. For she was a womanly, warm-hearted old lady, and the things she loved best on earth, far better than herself, were her daughter, and the god Snob, and her daughter's husband and child.

So presently, having dried her tears, she asked for "Margaret," whom she never gave less than her full appellation. "If confusion arise," she would say, "it is not of my making. *My* Margaret, according to the invariable rule in *my* family, was called after her maternal grandmother. 'Shorts' and pet names I cannot away with. They stick to one, stupidly, through life. Anthony must do as he pleases, but I refuse to address my own grandchild as 'Mops.'"

The child came in, very serious, with blue marks under her eyes, and that strange, "unlike" expression young children's faces so readily assume. She hid away in her grandmother's lap, and they cried together, comfortably. For when fifty-nine loves eight with all its heart, be sure that eight loves fifty-nine.

Not that the grandmother entirely approved of the grandchild. It had been the supreme triumph of the dead woman's tact to get her own way in essentials and to let Anthony have his in unessentials, whilst leaving upon Mrs. Fosby's mind a complacent impression of frequently-followed advice. But there were inevitably matters which Mrs. Fosby would have managed differently—"oh, very differently indeed!" "However," she would honestly declare, "people know their own minds best." Certainly she knew hers. And most other people's.

"Religion," said Mrs. Fosby, "is——" and she paused to adjust her knitting.

"Yes, mamma," replied her daughter; for Margaret knew that whatever Mrs. Fosby remarked about religion was sure to be correct.

"Essential," said Mrs. Fosby.

"Yes, mamma," repeated Margaret, fervently.

But "religion" is an expression which covers a multitude of sins. With Mrs. Fosby it meant learning all the Bible-stories (especially those of the Old Testament) and serving the great god Snob. Morally, it meant trying not to wish that Sir Henry might die a bachelor. "It is the truth of religion which chiefly appeals to mamma," declared Margaret.

Her husband smiled. "Yes," he said, "just as its beauty appeals to me, and its goodness to you. There you have our three characters, combined in the three attributes. It is the story of the Ring. To your mother religion means devils, to me it means angels, to you——" He paused.

"Just human creatures looking up to God," she said.

He bent to kiss her. "And, looking out of human creatures, God," he said.

But Mrs. Fosby had no patience with what she called "theories."

"On the most sacred subjects," said Mrs. Fosby, "to my own granddaughter, my lips are sealed. Not for worlds would I intrude upon her mother's task. Still, Margaret, when the child insisted upon splashing my new silk dress, I was compelled to refer to a possible visit from the bogey-man."

"Did she cry?" questioned Margaret anxiously.

"She did not. I am bound to confess she informed me the bogey-man was there already. It appears that, according to Anthony, *I* am the bogey-man!"

Anthony, however, always stoutly maintained that here was a misconception on somebody's part, and, as he liked his mother-

in-the-law, on the whole, and was both good-tempered and honest, he deserves to be taken at his word. He undertook, as a sort of *amende honorable*, to show Mrs. Fosby how carefully Margie was instructed in what the lady pleasantly denominated "Bible Lessons." An occasion soon presented itself. On a Sunday afternoon, dull, sluggish, suggestive of three o'clock tea, Margie, aged four-and-a-half, sat on the drawing-room carpet, be-starched and be-ribboned, playing with marbles. These latter were removed when Mrs. Fosby drove up, and a Noah's ark had been substituted, and Margie's tears had been dried, by the time that grandmamma entered and kissed her.

With grandmamma was the terrible Miss Murcham, grandmamma's spinster friend, a lady possessed of every virtue that is most honoured in the breach—one of those people who never drive or do anything else on the Sabbath unless they want to.

Miss Murcham, sweetly interested in Margie, took up a nondescript effigy from the floor. "And this," she said insinuatingly, "is Mrs. Noah's tortoise-shell cat."

"Moo—moo—cow," said Margie fiercely, snatching the animal away.

"A cow, is it?" The spinster reddened. "But what a very little one! It can't be much more than a calf, Margie—an orange calf!"

"Calfs *is* orange," said Margie, contentiously.

"She is thinking of the Bible picture-book," interposed Anthony prettily: "the Golden Calf, you know, Miss Murcham. It is very yellow in the picture. Margie, tell grandma all about the naughty Calf."

"Toby bited it right through," said Margie. "And Jimmy squealed."

"What?" exclaimed Mrs. Fosby.

"There is some mistake," remarked Anthony gravely. "Mops is referring to the

little boy's leg that was bitten two days ago by the stable-dog."

"Yes, bited it in its leg and it squealed," repeated Margie.

"There is no connection between the two subjects," said grandmamma tartly—"no connection at all. And I cannot comprehend Anthony's fondness for ferocious, not to say murderous, brutes. Sometimes, indeed, I cannot but realise that I come here in danger of my life."

"Oh, poor Toby's been shot," said Anthony. "They were afraid he was going mad, so they shot him to make sure, and that may happen to anyone—now, mayn't it? Look here, grandmamma, Mops knows a lot out of the Bible, don't you, Mops, dear? Give her the picture-book, Margaret; let her tell about the pictures."

Both parents bent fondly over their darling.

"It is Anthony's idea, you remember,"

said Margaret, proudly; "the engravings are taken from celebrated pictures. Now, Margie, tell grandmamma, what is the little boy doing with the lamb?"

But Margie, seated in front of the great volume on the floor, all starch and blue ribbons and obstinacy, refused, after the ignominious incident concerning the calf, to utter a word.

"These are Popish pictures, my dear," said Miss Murcham.

"It does seem a pity," assented Mrs. Fosby sadly, "that all the Italian painters should have been Roman Catholics. Michael Angelo, I have been told, was a Protestant; but, really, to judge by his paintings, an Italian Protestant might as well be a Papist as not."

Margaret smiled; but Anthony impatiently turned over a number of pages.

"Now, here," he said—"here are the parables. Tell grandmamma what the old man is doing, Mops."

Silence. Contemplation.

“Where had the young man been, Mops? Why was he coming home? When his father ran down from the top of the house, what did he say?”

More silence. Deeper contemplation.

“Now, Margie, you are very naughty. You know perfectly well. He put a beautiful coat on his back, and then he put rings on his fingers——”

“And bells on his toes,” said Margie, suddenly finding voice.

But Mrs. Fosby was by no means so foolish a woman as the careless generaliser would like to think. When Anthony—in his happy days a bit of a tease—informed her how Margie, having hiccoughed in the midst of her evening address to the Almighty, had paused and courteously interposed, “I beg your pardon,” before proceeding, Mrs. Fosby had merely answered: “The child is a gentle-

woman born," which shows her to have been sufficiently discriminating in her own peculiar sphere. Nor did she remember with any particular annoyance the scene between herself and Margie on a day when the child had been sent across to amuse her—she being confined to the house with a cold—and a desultory thunderstorm had abnormally protracted the visit.

"You mustn't be afraid of the thunder, Margie; it's the angels talking."

Far from reassured by this view, Margie hid away close under the sofa cushions. Presently, however, grandmamma sneezed several times consecutively. Margie drew forth her head, half timidly, and watched.

"And is the showers the angels sneezing, gran'ma?"

Into this little circle, full of mutual love, and the human diversities which quicken love, came the Angel of Death and cut the string

that held all the links together. "Gather up the fragments," He said in passing. And one poor human being, on his knees in the dust, holding together the severed ends that crumbled under his fretting, cried back that the chain still held.

CHAPTER III.

It was very early in the morning—the morning of the day after—when he threw open the boudoir door, and stood listening.

The deserted corridor was full of the awakening sunlight, cool and golden, with a hundred glinting suggestions of glories to come. He drew the door to and locked it carefully on the outside. Then he hastened down the solemn stillness with the step of a man who has taken a great resolve.

He went up straight to the nursery. Both rooms were deserted; bars of light fell between the shutters: from the inner chamber the child's cot had been removed, leaving an immense forlornness behind it. The discovery came home to him with a shock—a sensation of something having happened, a

change. Something that other people knew. They were acting, the outsiders. Life moved.

On the stairs a frightened undermaid met him, and sank away, white, from his white face, into the dusk. He asked calmly enough where the child was. In the breakfast-room? He went there, dully surprised.

All curtains were already drawn back—here at the back of the house—the room was as full of light and brightness as possible. Nurse Lintot sat droning a fairy tale. Close up against the woman's arm lay little Margaret, still in her cot, white-garmented, attentive.

“And the King said to the golden-haired Princess: But why is your name Misfortune?”——

The father stood in the doorway; Nurse Lintot dropped her book. “Papa!” cried little Margaret. There was a glad note in her voice; he caught it, and for the first time a sob rose to his throat.

"Come," he said, beckoning, "I want you to come at once." She crept out of bed, obedient, and took his hand. "Put something on her feet," he said gently, and led her away slippered, bare-legged. Nurse Lintot, shaking against the doorpost, watched them down the solemn sunlit corridor in the shadow of the awakening day. She saw them enter the room together—that room!—and its door closed heavily upon her heart.

Against the door, which her father had once more locked behind them, the child hung back, open-eyed. There was a fascination in the unfamiliar aspect of the long familiar room. Her glance fell on the shreds of china scattered here and there. "Oh," she exclaimed, "mamma's beautiful chandelier!" Her father took no notice; he was staring with a terrified, terrifying look at the couch by the window—her eyes followed his—on which mamma so often lay. And mamma lay

there now, with face unveiled, upturned to the light—mamma, of whom they had been telling her all yesterday—Nurse Lintot, Grandmamma Fosby, everyone—that she had gone to live with the angels, gone to heaven (above the sky), gone to live with God, gone, gone, that she would never see her again, at least never unless she was very good; she must always be a good little girl now, and comfort her poor father, and then, perhaps, if she died (which only other children do), etcetera.

“Mamma!” she cried out, regardless for the moment of the awe which had filled her, regardless of possible disturbance, of sickness, or sleep, of all things except her mother’s face. Suddenly she understood—completely. God had heard her unceasing prayers of yesterday—for God hears little children’s prayers—and had sent back from His far away, angel-filled heaven the mother she had cried for till Nurse told her it was naughty to cry. She no longer observed the torn hangings in

heaps on the floor, the sprinklings of rose-leaves from the gutted candlesticks, the dazzle of the naked windows against the streaming sun—her glance flashed to her father, standing expectant.

“Mamma!”

“Yes, yes, yes,” he said, finding passionate utterance. “That’s what I want you to do, Margie. That’s what I fetched you for. Think of it, she can’t hear me, Margie. She can’t hear me. She won’t hear me. I don’t know which. I’ve been calling to her for hours—for hours! I couldn’t tell how long: it doesn’t matter. She’d have heard me by this time, if she could, I think. But she’ll hear you, Margie: I want you to call her and wake her. Hush, you needn’t call *very* loud, not for other people to hear, you know. She used to hear you when you were a tiny baby, and when I said nothing had moved, she used to guess you wanted her: she couldn’t possibly have heard.

She'll hear you now, and wake, and answer. Margaret! Margaret! Oh my God—Margaret! Come here, Margie, come closer! Whisper in your mother's ear!"

The child drew near, trembling. She stood by the couch, and, as she leant forward, her yellow curls, in the crystal sunlight, mingled with the dead woman's darker locks. "Mamma," she whispered, under her father's eager gaze, "mamma!"

A groan broke from the wretched watcher. "She doesn't hear you," he exclaimed, "Oh Margie, you must call louder, too!" He sank down beside her and together they murmured against the impassive cheek, that one dear, unanswered word. His voice rose to a wail of disappointment; the child burst into tears.

A long, dead silence ensued in the flower and sun-filled room. Outside, a chaffinch broke into carolling: for a moment the still air seemed to ring with a rejoicing that deepened immediately into unendurable pain. The

widower rose to his feet and kissed his little daughter. "Little one, you must forgive me," he said, "come away!" He threw open the door. His wife's mother stood in the corridor, hurriedly summoned from a sleepless pillow, irresolute, white to the lips. "She is dead," exclaimed Anthony, and threw himself on her breast.

He had scarcely calmed down, when his brother came forward and held out a sympathetic hand. "He'll be all right after this, and a good thing too," thought the brother. For Henry Stollard took life simply, and always behaved as everyone would expect him to behave. A transparent nature himself, upright and sensible, he thought everybody else was sensible and transparent too. At the sound of his voice, the younger brother turned round, disengaging himself, and stood, apparently collected.

"Oh, Henry, is that you?" he said, "how

are you? It was very kind of you to come." Then he looked away and desired Lintot to get Miss Margie ready for going out at once. Mrs. Fosby, interposing, said something about dress-makers and parcels, and not leaving the house.—"Oh, what does it matter?" he answered quite gently. "We can get what she wants for her anywhere. Black clothes I suppose you mean—mamma?" And he strode down the passage, thoughtfully brushing his crumpled sleeve. His brother followed him. "Anthony," said Sir Henry, "I wish you would listen to me for just one minute. There are some unavoidable arrangements."

Anthony stopped. "Yes, of course," he said, "I understand what you mean, quite well. I wish you would see to all that for me, Henry. You could not do me a greater service. To me it is all a matter of supreme indifference."

"All?"

“All.”

“But, Anthony, the responsibility! I should be so vexed, if there were anything you would wish done differently!”

Anthony interrupted him with a weary gesture.

“There is nothing I should wish done differently,” he said, “because, you see, there is nothing I should wish done at all. I am going away at once with Margie, for good. This is no place for her or for me. Do as you like in everything. I shall be so glad. You are sure to act right, Henry. You always know what your duty is, and you always do it. I mean——” He hesitated, flushed, imagining he had said something unkind.

“I’m so glad you think so,” said Henry warmly. “I shall be delighted—I mean, I am willing to do whatever I can for you. But, Anthony, I don’t understand about your going away. In this most trying crisis—this, this terrible affliction, I do trust that you will

ask yourself, Anthony, what Duty requires of you. There are moments in our lives, dear Anthony——”

“There are,” said the widower. “Yes, Henry, you are quite right, and many thanks! I am so unfortunate—as I have often told you—I have never in all my life been absolutely sure what my duty was. Do you know, I have sometimes thought I should have done it, if I had.” He moved towards the entrance hall where Margie stood tremulously waiting.

Sir Henry followed, fresh-coloured, clean-shaven, even at that unaccustomed hour—a sharp contrast to the other’s haggard appearance, the keen artist features, the miserable eyes.

“Duty, like a stern Preceptor——” said Sir Henry in an agitated voice: he always spouted one of his few poets when strongly moved. Poetry and sentiment somehow go together, with unsentimental men. He hardly knew

what he was saying. There rose up before him a vision of the funeral, the relations, Anthony's empty place. "Duty——"

"I shall write from London to-night," said Anthony. "Please, meanwhile, do, all of you, whatever you think best. Come, Margie, we are going away together. There is nothing whatever now to keep us here."

The little girl hung back. She would not allude, in words, to the treasure they were leaving behind, but she looked up appealingly into her father's face.

"There is nothing here," he repeated, and he drew her by the hand. "Come with me, Margie. That is best. Come away!" They passed together through the entrance door, out into the beautiful, warm, laughing summer; they passed down the gravel slope, amid sunshine and singing and green splendour, and away into the bushes, out of sight.

At the corner, where the straining eyes from the house had lost them, he stopped and

looked back. Towards the projecting window, the one, curtainless, bay-window. He looked long, holding the child's hand. It was the farewell look: of that he was resolved: he would never return. At last he gazed down into the little upturned face. "If she had loved us," she said, half under her breath, "she would never have gone!"

Some country people they met on the high road, recognising him, stared in astonishment. He shrank under their mute interrogation. At the little station—an outpost of Rusborough Junction—he quivered with momentary annoyance. "Poor child!" said a motherly farm-wife. He rebelled against the words. He bought Margie a couple of stale buns, sweets, and half-a-dozen illustrated papers. Alone with her in a compartment of the slow uptrain, he talked brightly, with abundant promises of toys, and told of the glories awaiting her in London. But presently he sank back in his corner, and watched

the green hedges steal endlessly by. And he thought of his brother, and Sir Henry's Wordsworthian quotations. Suddenly, he also quoted Wordsworth:

"And oh !
The difference to me !"

He set his teeth hard, and the tears in his eyes stood still.

CHAPTER IV.

IN London the widower bought new clothes for himself and his daughter. He wrote to Mrs. Fosby that he was going abroad, with the child, for six months. There was absolutely no reason why he should remain in England; there was one reason—the vault at Stawell—why he should wish to quit the country. Mrs. Fosby must have patience, and so must Lintot. Dear, gossipy old Lintot would understand that some efficient person must be found to continue the early instruction which had been the mother's peculiar care. He would do his very best for the child. He sought a highly-qualified governess, one of those wonders warranted to teach far more than any one can learn; he hesitated about engaging a lady whose Greek

was no more than elementary; at the last moment he carried off to Geneva a good creature who could read, write, and "do sums," and who had just nursed through a fatal illness, with untiring devotion, the child of a widower like himself. For Margaret his care was unceasing; he bought her everything she needed and everything she asked for. The one thing that gave him pleasure seemed to be pleasing the child. And she, in the demureness of her eight smooth summers, did nothing to shame his tenderness; she asked neither for an elephant nor for the moon.

So they went away to the azure Leman, and there silence fell upon them, and peace. Gradually life again took distinct shape around the mourner. Miss Gray wrote home that "to see Mr. Stollard with Margaret would make a Mahatma cry." She believed a Mahatma to be "a cruel Indian idol," but that is neither here nor there.

Quite unexpectedly, a month after leav-

ing England, Anthony undertook his little daughter's education, pleasantly, conversationally, in walks and talks. "Sums" he abandoned to the governess: the world and its inhabitants, past and present, were his theme. When the first agony of her bereavement had softened down, he no longer "spoilt" the child by visible indulgence, but sedulously afforded her an overflow of those small pleasures which child-nature so harmlessly assimilates. It was manifest that he strove to occupy his thoughts with her feelings and requirements; his chief preoccupation was her happiness. Let her be happy, in the first place. "Make her laugh," he would say to Miss Gray; "I should like to hear her laugh all day." He himself made her laugh. "Who," asked a guest of the hotel-keeper, "who is that miserable-looking man? The man that romps with a little girl, dressed in black?"

Of the dead mother left behind them, the

joy dropped from their lives, he never spoke. The child must be happy. Let the dead past bury its dead. In his own midday a ghost walked incessant; to children a wise man breathes no word of ghosts. From the hour he had crossed his ruined threshold no allusion to Margaret passed his lips. He never called the child Margaret. He checked her reminiscences. "Mamma used to say——" "Mamma used to like——" he turned the conversation gently, turned gradually the current of her thoughts, but along a dam of suffering whose height he little guessed.

For the child still clung, through memories which daily grew fainter, to the dear image she yearned not to lose. She was eight years old; she could understand as much as most of us about earthly love and death's consummation, the mystery before and the mystery beyond. She longed to recall with her father the one great happiness which already, in her young life, formed a past. "We must

render her youth happy," said the father, "whatever misfortune befalls you in after life, nothing can rob you of a happy childhood. And, please, you must not mention her mother, Miss Gray."

Once he turned quickly, having said so much, and came back in the heavy dusk. "Does she?" he said hoarsely. He steadied his voice. "Does she speak of her mother, I mean?"

"Very seldom, indeed, Mr. Stollard. Hardly ever, now."

"Ah!"—there was pain in the cry. "That is right; I am very glad. Good-evening, Miss Gray."

No, indeed, Margie did not care to broach the subject to her governess. With nervous perception she had readily understood that Miss Gray's interest, however sincere, could not be otherwise than perfunctory. Quite in the beginning, at Paris, Miss Gray had spoken once or twice of mamma, for Margie's sake.

Was mamma tall? Had she brown hair, or black? The child shuddered. To speak thus to a stranger, as of a stranger, made her mother seem farther, not nearer. Yet occasionally the fulness of her young fancies swelled over her lips.

“Miss Gray, I like best to think of mamma at night. I can see her best in the dark.”

“Yes, dear. But little girls should sleep at night.”

As Margie did, her vigils being little more than a leisurely closing of eyelids.

And gradually the vision grew fainter. A beautiful phantasm, very dissimilar, took the place of the beautiful reality. Pictures of the Madonna mingled with a portrait never seen again. An unspeakably tender mother, wreathed in the far glories of heaven, pressing to her bosom her own little motherless girl.

In the grown man's soul, on the contrary,

where the clear image lived omnipresent, a vain desire had awoke to forget. A small impulse of resentment arose in his desolation against the woman who had left him, "For she was pure and good and prayed to God daily. If God hears prayers at all, He must hear such prayers as hers. Had she asked Him, He would have let her remain." That was his argument, felt to be foolish at first, clung to all the more vehemently on that account, ultimately accepted, unreasonable or not.

"Mamma wanted to go," he burst out one evening to Margie. They were standing at a point where the upper road from Vevey slopes down to Clarens. Far away before them, against the pale empyrean, rose in sparkling serenity the many-topped Dent du Midi. From its granite foundations the broad lake swelled towards them, purple with shadow, dark against the white masses of villas that sank in a half-circle at their feet. Mar-

gie, in her black frock, was aimlessly picking and dropping big daisies along the pretty twist of road. Anthony stood still, and his eyes went wandering over the vast, vine-coloured valley, to where the castle of Blonay hangs grey against the hills.

Margie desisted from her flower plucking.

"Where to?" she asked.

The question took him aback. Already he was ashamed of his utterance. He was relieved and vexed, to find she had not understood.

"Don't destroy the daisies, Mops. What's the use of killing things? There's death enough in the world without our help."

"But there are such lots of daisies, papa!"

"Yes, and there are lots of little girls; and each daisy can only die once. Ah, well! this is a beautiful country, isn't it, Mops?"

"Yes, papa; is it as beautiful as heaven?"

"No, no! Heaven is far more beautiful."

"A hundred times more beautiful?"

"Yes, certainly."

"A hundred million billion times more beautiful?"

"Ye—es, I suppose so. What makes you so exact?"

"Heaven can't be as beautiful as Switzerland to mamma, papa?"

"My dear child! Look at that ox-cart creeping up, with the great wine barrels."

"She's all alone with God in heaven, papa, she doesn't know any of the angels."

"She is with God—she is with God," replied the father passionately.

"But she could have been in Switzerland with God, too, papa. She always said God was everywhere, and *we* can't be everywhere, like God."

"She is nearer to God in heaven, Margie, and she loves God so much, she wants to be nearest Him first."

He could not keep all bitterness out of the word.

Margie shook her head.

"I don't believe it one bit," she said. "I don't think you quite know, papa. You see, you can't be sure. But I'm sure that, if God would only let her, she'd come back to us, with Him."

"Hush—hush, child. That can never be. Sooner would He fetch us to where she is."

"Oh, no, that's quite impossible," said Margie, with great decision.

He stopped in surprise.

"You and I aren't good enough to go to heaven, papa," said Margie, lifting her innocent eyes to her father's face. She had not the remotest conception of having stated an unpleasant fact. He walked on quietly, without reply.

Presently he slackened his pace. "The more reason for her to stay with us!" he exclaimed. The child came running up, shyly, conscious of something wrong, and pressed

into his hand the lost bunch of her daisies. He turned down to the hotels by the oak; the pair proceeded side by side. As he went, he began abstractedly plucking at one of the flowers in his hand. "She loves me—loves me not—much—little—not at all." Not at all; not at all;—up yonder, in the silvery-blue heaven, did she see him throw the flowers away?

"Oh! papa," said Margie, aggrieved.

The picturesque bit of road which winds down from Clarens Railway Station to the lake shone golden in the twilight. Over the wooden gables and galleries of the vine-dressers' houses hung masses of greenery; in the white sun moved slow carts and mild-eyed oxen; great barrels, overrunning with must, lay by the roadside, on the carts, in the wide-opened doors of the vat-filled storehouses. The intoxication of new wine was on all things, dripping from the ladders, rising from

the vats and splashes, hanging on the heavy air. The hot faces of the labourers breathed it, the little children laughed it, grape-bedecked, running in and out, with the pails upon their shoulders, through the trellis-work, golden and green. And the small grapes of the country, amber, like little bags of sunshine, seemed to have caught the laugh of the skies and of the children, in ripples of variegated colour, the laugh that played on the plains and the hill-sides, and the myriad workers among them, the blessing of full measure pressed down and running over, the wine of universal rejoicing, of travail and plenteous fertility. There was gladness in the hearts of men, the brave gladness of God-sanctioned effort triumphant, the glad knowledge that the Maker and the worker, in wondrous union of labour, had thus filled to overflowing the empty vine vats of the wedding feast. Heaven had kissed earth in the heats of that azure summer—

earth, from her swelling bosom casting forth the fires that consumed her, poured back to heaven the jocund delirium of man.

The weight of universal gladness became more than Anthony Stollard could bear. Early in October he carried off his little daughter to Nice.

CHAPTER V.

THE Riviera, as everyone knows, is by no means a land of jollity. It is the abode of perpetual diversion, and also of persistent disease—for along its smiling shores crowd those who know not how to live, and those who know not how to die. In its palm-enfolded palaces the man who cannot sleep for dissipation lies down beside the man who cannot sleep for pain. And, at night, the reveller, returning, crosses, in a by-street, the clandestine *cortège* of Death.

In no spot on earth does louder clang of cymbals strike upon softer air; nowhere may Danae so shamelessly bare her brazen bosom, or Midas so greedily gorge of the banquet which crushes his soul. And nowhere, surely, do Midas's ears show quite so plain.

All the world over the great circles of dissipation still centre, doubtless, in the doings of the vicious few. These are prominent, much chronicled, coveted from afar. But other wheels of life revolve around them, wheels within wheels innumerable, and each man must attend to his own. "Society" is a sort of performance that goes on, like the puppet-show, in front of your honest workshops and smithies; you pay your sixpence, or a penny, for the pleasure of being present (in print): and the town is full of honest artisans still. But the little world of this little sun-dazzled corner is only "society," there is nothing under and nothing around it: self-inflated, it revolves around itself, the conglomerate Supereminence of the nineteenth century, the shoddiest and shadiest aristocracy that ever the heavens laughed upon—till they fell in.

Anthony Stollard stood aside, watching the flow of turgid amusement. When a man

is melancholy, amusement proves a remedy that either kills or cures: in no case, however, should it be applied from without. To the onlooker there is always something drearily senseless in the gambols, on a platform, of the kid-booted human beast. Vice, to be impressive, must smell of the field and the wine-press: drunkenness and obscenity may be, in their own terrible way, great deeds in the great service of too great a master, but nobody admires from a vantage-point the palliardise of patchouli, *pâté*, and paint.

On the loud terrace of Monte Carlo Anthony walked in the full glory of the declining day. There was sunlight all about him—sunlight on the broad stretch of embankment, with its luxuriance of flowers and verdure; sunlight on the gilt and gaudy Casino; sunlight on the castle crag of the Robber Princes; sunlight, in wide sweeps, across the purple ocean; sunlight, continuously downpouring, upon the gold and silver-grey belt of encir-

cling hill-side; sunlight, far stretching and clear, on the endless curves of Mediterranean sea-coast; sunlight, yellow, Pactolian, everywhere—but shadow away towards white Bordighera, towards Italy, the land of art, and art-love, and art-service, the beauty for which no Napoleons can pay.

He strolled to and fro amid the balm and the brilliance: on all sides rose a flutter of elegance, a vision of pale silks and glowing furs, the chatter of Babel, the graces of Babylon, the blooms, and the snakes, and the appetites of Paradise. He tried not to listen for the “bang” of the pigeon-shooting down below, whose inexorable return strikes the lover of true sport like a blow—and yet a blow—and yet a blow—across the face. He tried not to remark, detesting superciliousness, the obtrusive fact that almost every male countenance which passed him was the countenance of a fool or of a knave; he tried not to trace, abhorring dis-

courtesy, in what manner the marvellous women were thus skilfully manufactured. A pale Russian in passing, paused imperceptibly—for one moment her passionate glance dwelt complacently on his; he turned towards the ocean with a smile in his eyes. Sorrow is a sacred thing, and scorn a righteous; but there's not a heart of man on earth that doesn't leap to a woman's approval.

He hung against the parapet, sick with the nostalgia of enjoyment. Life had been kind to him hitherto. At her banquet are dress seats, reserved, velvet-cushioned, to which some struggle upward, for which some get an order on entering. It was not the velvet cushions he cared about, never having missed them; what he wanted was the feast.

The sad resentment in his heart had deepened, as its sorrow calmed down. He was angry with the dead wife he still dearly loved; he was angry with God. He hated the religion which calls its best devotees away to

the willing ecstasies of heaven. "He that loveth son or daughter more than Me"—twice, he remembered, his wife had quoted the words to him—ah, poor little orphan Margie! Ah, how he hated the words!

His eyes swept over the tawdry parakeets preening themselves on the terrace. If Margaret's prayers remained unanswered—there is nothing up yonder but sky.

"Mr. Stollard, of all people!" said a bright voice behind him. He turned to the owner, a florid woman, brightly laughing, brightly dressed. "You here at Monte Carlo? Only passing through, of course!"

"I am at Nice, Lady Mary. I have been there for a week."

"At Nice? That is reassuring. I should have put you down to Cannes. Cannes, Mentone, Nice; with you men they are the three degrees of hypocrisy. They all mean Monte Carlo. Now I am here, frankly, at the Hôtel de Paris."

"I assure you, I have not the remotest idea——"

"No, of course not. The remotest idea is Cannes. And of course Mrs. Stollard is with you; you are just the sort of man to come here with your wife."

He flushed. "My wife died three months ago," he said.

"Oh, I'm so sorry! I had not the slightest—we have been away in South Africa—I noticed your mourning, I made sure it was your mother-in-law! Forgive me, I beg of you; you will think me quite brutal, but you know I'm not." Her voice dropped over the last word, full of meaning; she hurried on. "Yes, we have been to South Africa; I thought it exceedingly tiresome, but my husband liked it. He says it's Tom Tiddler's ground, without any Tom Tiddler."

"I hope Mr. Hunt is well," said Anthony stiffly.

"Oh, quite well, thanks. But he doesn't approve of Monte Carlo. He has the queerest prejudices about making money. South Africa he thinks all right."

"As a money-making concern, compared with the Casino?" said Anthony. "I can quite understand his view."

"Now that is unjust to dear old Montey. You don't mind my saying 'Montey,' do you? I know it's vulgar, deliciously vulgar, but there's no harm in being vulgar as long as you're aware of the fact."

Anthony made no reply.

"Plenty of people win at the tables. Lady Gawtry won two thousand louis the other night. And Arthur Coverdale told me he had won a lot last year. That is so nice of him, so encouraging; people never tell one about their winnings. But if you go into the rooms (as of course you do), you can see the Duchess piling up her banknotes night after night."

"The Duchess!" repeated Anthony vaguely.

"Well, you *are* a newcomer! The new Duchess of Dorrisford! Sam Hicks's only daughter. Her father made all his money by living with a female detective and keeping her drunk. She is charming; I'm exceedingly attached to her, but I must say, though I know that it's mean of me, I *should* like to see her lose a little now and then."

"Surely, Lady Mary, *you* can't want money."

"Thanks. How kind of you to remind me. No, I have money enough, thank Heaven; but that's no reason why I should want everybody else to win."

He raised his hat, but she retained him.

"Don't go," she said; "you can't know a single soul here, or you wouldn't have asked about the Duchess. There isn't a stupider place than Monte Carlo for those who look

on; you *must* be in the thick of it. I want to introduce you to my daughter, she is coming towards us, that girl yonder in blue; I sent her for my daily *Gil Blas*. My daughter: doesn't it sound absurd, Anthony? She is very nearly as old as I am, you know. Eveline, this is Mr. Stollard, a very old friend of mine, a neighbour in Oakshire. Give me the paper, dear."

The step-daughter gazed full at this new old acquaintance with a gaze that said nothing. Her whole manner, her features and complexion, betokened pallid indifference, a little studied perhaps—the indifference which stops short of neglect.

"Don't you wish they wouldn't shoot the pigeons?" she said.

Lady Mary looked up with an impatient exclamation. "One might have known she would say that. I thought you would have grown wiser, Eveline, after Colonel Coxe's answer the other day. 'Oh, I don't mind,'

said the Colonel, 'so long as they don't shoot as many as me!' "

"I've got wiser about faces now," said the girl.

"Dear me, you are improving! That is almost a compliment to Mr. Stollard, as far as it goes. I tell Eveline she is morbid about the *tir*. The pigeons I pity at Monte Carlo are the ones that shoot themselves."

"Yes, two a day," said Miss Hunt, in a matter-of-fact tone, "from sixty to seventy a month. But I don't pity those one bit. It's their own free will to come and play, and they have to bring their money with them."

"And leave it behind them," said Anthony.

Lady Mary laughed. "That sounds like Bo-peep's sheep," she said. "I wish you would take us over to the restaurant and give us some tea."

They moved across the gravelled terrace.

"And I hope there will be no musicians," remarked Eveline.

"What *do* you care, child?" The step-daughter winced. "Eveline's whole life, Mr. Stollard, is spoilt by her noticing small disagreeables. How did Count de la Faille express it? '*Elle s'appuie sur le côté fâcheux.*'"

"I can't help listening when people play false," said Eveline.

"That's just the difference. Other people hear, but you listen. Now, I don't analyse the music, I just like the cheerful noise."

Eveline shrugged her eyebrows, ever so slightly. Once or twice she cast inquiring glances at Mr. Stollard, whose countenance she evidently considered too good for her step-mother's company. She dropped away from the others so that she might speak her thoughts aloud, a lonely habit she had got into years ago. "Blessed are the blind," she said under her breath, "and trebly blessed they who only see themselves." Anthony

overheard her. "An unpleasant girl," he thought. For men never like a woman to feel on her own initiative.

"Now what *I* object to," said Lady Mary, as she settled herself by the little table in the road, "is the invariable mustiness of the cakes. Why, for goodness sake, can't they stop baking three whole days and then start afresh? Anthony, I wish you would suggest that to the head man yonder. It is an excellent idea! But of course, like all men, you are afraid to interfere. A three days' strike in the kitchen would set them right, but I don't approve of strikes."

The girl had looked up with wide-eyed astonishment as the stranger's Christian name escaped from her step-mother's lips.

"Oh, Mr. Stollard and I are such very old friends," said Lady Mary. "We used to play together; don't you remember our playing together, Anthony?"

"Yes, I remember your playing with me,"

replied Anthony. "Lady Mary, I fear I must be getting down to the station."

A look of positive annoyance swept over Lady Mary's genial face. "Oh, nonsense, you must dine with us to-night," she said. "Why, Anthony, it's ten years since we met. I'm not going to let you slip away." He looked along his black sleeve. "True, you must dress," said Lady Mary, "but you've plenty of time to run over to Nice. Everybody does. I shall certainly expect you. I have one or two people coming, quite a small party. All people you know, or ought to."

"You forget that I am in mourning," he began.

The lady dropped her eyeglass. "When—when did you say it was?" she asked, lowering her voice in a not very successful effort at sympathy. "It cannot be so very recent, Anthony, or I should hardly have met you here."

"So I fear you must kindly excuse me——"

“I tell you it is quite a small party. My cousins Croylet, and Sir Arthur Banks, and Mrs. T. P. Pott. Don't be absurd. People must dine whatever happens; and nobody—nobody, I tell you, Anthony—yes, I shall sometimes call you Anthony, as I always used to do—nobody keeps to the old etiquette about mourning. You may take my word for it. I am an authority on the new style—not on the old, I confess. It's all style now-a-days, not etiquette. There's not a Court in Europe has any etiquette left to speak of. Well, excepting the Austrian and the Spanish, perhaps. I've been the round of them, in a Baedekerish way, of course. And as for manners, they're dead and gone. It's 'manner' now-a-days has taken their place. If your 'manner' is all right, you'll do. We shall dine at eight. Till then, good-bye!” She walked away quickly, leaving no opportunity for further refusal.

In the train Anthony Stollard reproached

himself for doing a thing he did not desire to do. And also for the half-heartedness of his non-desiring. It must be admitted that, after three months of unadulterated Margie, melancholy, and Miss Gray, he had felt the repellant attraction of Monte Carlo increasing upon him at the very moment, when whom should he meet, of all persons, but Lady Mary Hunt! Twelve years ago, when they were little more than children, Lady Mary and he had found unadulterated pleasure in one another's society. In those days she was Lady Mary Dellys, one of the too numerous daughters of the Stollards' noble but impoverished neighbour, the Earl of Foye. People quite expected to see them "make a match of it," when suddenly her engagement was announced to Mr. Thomas Hunt, of the City firm of Hunt, Fenning (originally Pfennig), Steele Bros., and Hunt, Bankers. Mr. Hunt's years, like his annual thousands, were more than half a hundred. It was the old squalid story, and all

Lady Mary's relations agreed with her that she had acted for the best, and, on the whole, was lucky. Two years later Anthony, perfectly heart-whole, married a girl he had loved at first sight—and second—and Lady Mary, perfectly contented, sent him a silver butter-dish.

And now this woman suddenly crosses his path with her grown-up step-daughter beside her. In those early days he had always found her delightful to talk to; a healthy element, full of the qualities he lacked—easy good nature, good sense. He was fascinated now by the desire to compare her with herself; the whole of his married life lay between Lady Mary Dellys and Lady Mary Hunt.

He found Margie awaiting him, tiresomely expectant: "I thought you weren't coming, papa." For every evening at six o'clock he taught her, compelled to do so by his choice of an utterly incompetent governess. The lessons had become a daily drag; to-

night she was specially inattentive. He closed the book with indignant protest and left her. A man's world, after all, contains a great deal more than churchyards and little children. It was with a feeling almost of pleasure that he got out his dress things and returned to Monte Carlo in the overcrowded corridor train.

The Restaurant des Princes was full of lights and lightness; light hangings, light dresses, light women, light laughter. On the air, which alone was heavy, rose incessantly the music of champagne corks and princely titles; two reigning monarchs were dining at little tables in the crowd, comparatively unnoticed this evening, because the Duchess di Valdemarina had with her the latest Paris music-hall man.

"You shall sit in this corner," said Lady Mary to Anthony. "You will feel nice and quiet with your back against the wall, and, besides, you will have the best view of Diane."

"And who is Diane?" asked Anthony. He had a knack of saying awkward things in a room full of people, while in dialogue he performed miracles of tact.

"The goddess of chastity. My dear Mrs. Pott, may I introduce an old friend, Mr. Stollard? Surely, Mr. Stollard, you know my cousin, Lady Ermyntrude Croylett? I can't say whether anybody else can endure tuberoses on a dinner table, but I know that I have too little brains, or too much, to support them, so ôtez-moi ces fleurs, je vous en prie."

The little company was very gay, as are all such little companies, which, by a merciful dispensation, laugh incessantly for want of wit. While everyone reprobated gambling as a habit, the talk was almost entirely of luck at the tables. Mrs. Pott, a pretty American, recently divorced (by the way, she is now the Countess Crachaska), had no other aspiration in life than to show off her diamonds among people of title; Lady Ermyntrude Croylett,

quite content with being Lady Ermyntrude, had no aspiration at all. Anthony sat between Mrs. Pott and the hostess; the latter was resolved he should thoroughly enjoy himself, and not only that night.

“You make a mistake,” she said. “Do, pray, permit me to say what I want to. I think you have been making it all these years. No man should balance his whole life on a pin-point, no, not though that point be the purest of diamonds. Oh, I daresay my metaphors are mixed; I don’t pretend to be a talker. What I mean is—and I know about the world, and making one’s self comfortable in it: have plenty of foundations! Something’s always coming down in some corner. Now I—oh, my dear Mrs. Pott, I could not think of your declining that lobster-*soufflé!*”

“Well,” she said, as they rose from table, “have you enjoyed my little dinner?” He could honestly answer “Yes.” He had seen

little in his life of that brightness, and prettiness, and flashy merriment which pass so well for happiness. Even when abroad with his wife, or, more rarely, in London, he had lived secluded in his own affections. "His brother is Sir Henry, you know," said Lady Mary to Mrs. T. P. Pott. "He has recently lost his wife. During ten years he has lived with her, and loved her, and painted pictures she admired."

The company separated on its way to the Casino; acquaintances don't want to see each other's play.

"You do not seriously mean to say that you have never been in the rooms?" asked Lady Mary, pausing before the pompously guarded door. "Do you know, Anthony, it's a good thing that matters went as they did. You and I would never have got on together."

"I have been in the rooms—the atmosphere is stifling. I have never gambled."

"Worse still! You are like your namesake. I can forgive a man for avoiding temptation, but not for resisting it. The one may be angelic, but the other is unhuman."

He smiled irritably. "You enjoy the good things of life," he said.

She burst out laughing.

"It is the bad things I enjoy," she replied, passing in. "Oh, I know I am shocking you, but I don't do it on purpose. At least, I mean, I trust I am doing it in kindness. I pity you," and now her voice was really grown gentle; "good-bye for the present. The bald man over there is my favourite croupier. I always begin with a little roulette."

He found himself in the middle of the crowded rooms, surrounded by that hot stench and stuffy dazzle which everybody knows. Here and there among the dull gilding the tables made islands of yellow glare, with the eager faces massed around them, the

low summons of the officials, the click, click of the ball. He edged into a circle, mechanically assuming that air of indifference which everyone, except an occasional plunger, wears visibly put on, like paint.

At the moment of his entrance nobody was playing for more than money, nor for much of that, as money counts at Monte Carlo; the large sprinkling of spectators—the good people, tourists—were getting impatient for their expected sensation, which so rarely comes. The croupiers leant back yawning, insisting, “Faites votre jeu, messieurs, faites votre jeu!”

“Oh, let’s go to one of the other tables,” said a prim person at Anthony’s shoulder. “Jim says the Trawnteycawrant is best; he was here last year with Suzan.” As they moved off he caught her prim companion’s reply: “How awful it would be”—with infinite relish—“if somebody shot themselves while we were here; the Society Report says

they constantly do!" "Le jeu est fait," said a weary voice, under Anthony. In sudden silence the little ball went whizzing round.

He, too, wandered away to the farther rooms where everything is so much more reposeful, and where the quiet gold looks so harmless on the smooth expanse of green. He found the curious crowd collected round the cool Duchess of Dorrisford; he saw Mrs. Pott take the seat which her maid had retained for her. A man with a head like a bull's was risking thousands indifferently; somebody mentioned his—South African—name. "The devil won't let *him* lose," said one of his friends.

Anthony drifted from one room to another, a very doubtful form of diversion; ultimately he returned to the roulette he had started from. Trade had looked up; Zéro had come out twice running; three rows of faces had thickened round the chairs. The same types were here present as all over the

tawdry palace, evil types of men, and many foolish—the foolish ones faultlessly groomed—and terrible old women in diamond-be-sprinkled satins, and plenty of fresh-looking, lightly-clothed girls. Presently Anthony put down a five-franc piece on a colour, inevitably—the other colour came up, and he saw the coin swept away. As he bent forward to place his money, he observed the look of an old man standing in front of him, just the kind of haggard yearning one expects to find at the tables, and never does see at first, and always sees the next moment—the man was not playing, but carefully watching the game. Anthony held out a couple more silver pieces; unable to reach far enough, he asked the other, who was carefully looking away, to place them.

“You will watch your money yourself, if you please,” said the man, as he ungraciously complied. “Here, at Monte Carlo, you know——” and he shrugged his lean shoul-

ders. Anthony, with a jerk of his wrist, flung a louis on "impasse." At that moment the table was heavily laden. At the call of "14," the two silver coins disappeared from the black, but two gold pieces lay, immovable, in front of the beginner. He let them lie: a moment later there were four; he let them lie. "Faites votre jeu, messieurs!" "Rien ne va plus!" The number 9 was called; four fresh gold-pieces came clinking down on the other four. He could not stretch out his arm to take up the money. He hesitated; a moment later, in the general scramble, a croupier had dexterously whisked the neglected "orphans" away.

"Pardon, what are you doing with my stake," said a harsh voice, directly in front of Anthony. The latter started; it was the haggard old Frenchman speaking, and his words were imperiously addressed to the croupier. "Your stake?" repeated the official, facing right round, in supremest scorn. The usual

brief altercation immediately ensued, fierce on the one side, firm on the other. Suddenly Anthony interposed: "The money belongs to this gentleman," he said in Anglo-French, "I witness that it belongs to this gentleman." The whole table was watching with concentrated interest, eager for the defeat of the croupier. "Oh, if the gentleman saw him put down the stake," said the latter, with temper, and immediately paid the three hundred and twenty francs into the Frenchman's dingy hand, for he was aware that the money had been gained by some person who did not claim it, and the bank cannot afford—nor does it require—to be difficult. Above all must it avoid investigation or inquiry of any kind. Anthony drew a long breath; he stopped playing, and watched half-a-dozen of the napoleons—his napoleons—disappear, one by one, from the old man's hand, in full on the 3. Then, actually, the number came up; without any expresison on his cadaver-

ous countenance the croupier paid seven banknotes of a hundred francs into the claws outstretched behind him. Immediately the old man left the table, and Anthony also lounged away. The official's eyes followed the pair; he had thought himself acquainted with every trick of the game.

The old rogue, looking round, met the neophyte's convicting glance. He turned back to him at once. "Monsieur," he said recklessly, "you have saved me. The money was yours. Why did you give it me? I know not, unless it be of your nature to do beautiful things—— Stay!"—for he misread the other's expression of disgust—"I understand. You saw that to support me was your unique chance of recovering it" (that, indeed, had been the man's natural explanation from the first); "but, Monsieur, you are a stranger here, you would never have secured it. I saw your dilemma. I came to your assistance. These rascally croupiers! they all cheat! I

know them well. Ah, the public imagine there can be no cheating, the fools! But a hundred francs—what say you? You see I am open-handed. I will sacrifice one hundred francs.”

“Keep the money,” answered Anthony. “But tell me; what made you win that 3?”

“What made me win? Ah, a merciful Providence! Or perhaps the croupier was not attending to the stakes. Besides, occasionally they must allow a number to come up ‘en plein.’ Though not for me, I should say—not for me! Monsieur, I have lost millions at Monte Carlo; inalterably, now, I play the number 3. It is the number of the Blessed Trinity. And you see how, when again I was starving, again it has wondrously assisted me.”

Anthony recoiled; as he did so, a young woman passed by them, in crimson and emeralds, leaning against a white-haired dandy with exhausted eyes. “Five louis more, mon

petit chou," the woman was saying; "only five louis more! The luck must turn at last!" Anthony walked straight out into the brilliant vestibule. It was airy, roomy, cheerful with colour and movement. From the corner of a sofa Eveline Hunt came towards him, pale, rather interesting, in her pale evening frock.

"Could you get my cloak?" she asked abruptly. "Lady Mary has the number: it is 1102; I daresay they will let you have it. If not, I shall just go without. I can wait here no longer." As he followed her, she turned upon him. "How can you come to this horrible place?" she exclaimed. "You have no right to—you!" and, before his look of amazement, "Lovely? It is loathsome. Sometimes I fancy I see the inside of things like—what do they call him?—Röntgen? I'm not as good as many people—oh, I've not the most distant desire to be good; all the worst of my acquaintances are 'good'—but I can't stand

this! Just look at the faces streaming out—only look at them! Look at those who have won; their expressions are still more disgusting than those of the many who've lost. And the poisonous atmosphere we spend half our day in, we, the Sybarite seekers after health! The management knows better than to provide fresh air for hot heads! I've been in there for hours, watching the play. Lady Mary imagines the *zéro* accounts for the millions of profits, year after year! She won't—but it's no use talking. I don't pity the poor fools who blow out the brains they haven't got. I pity—don't mind me, please, Mr. Stollard. I always say and do the wrong thing; but that, in the world I live in, must surely be a sort of virtue. Yes, that is the cloak; you see, the man knows me. I can't imagine what made me burst out; I suppose it's a sort of compliment. Please tell mamma I had a headache. It's quite true. Good-night."

"Let me see you to the hotel," he suggested.

"Oh, no, thanks. It's just over the way. As a favour, please not." She escaped from him, a white flutter among the greenery and the lights.

"A girl who might come right, and who may go wrong," he said to himself, philosophically. "Probably, like most women of the set she is in, she will do neither." He went back, and found Lady Mary, to whom he gave her step-daughter's message. Her Ladyship shrugged her comfortable shoulders. "Eveline is so foolishly clever," she said, "and that is unluckily a combination I have little sympathy with. But, honestly, it is rather in *your* way, you know; I mean people with more brains than they quite know how to use. Some people spoil everything by thinking about it. I myself have never seen brains succeed in the world. Adaptability, is not that the word? Have you had good luck?

Oh, of course you've played; people always do. I won three times running on 'couleur gagne'; I'm going now. Take me back to the hotel. You've any number of trains. But you'd much better come and stay here. You would have a splendid time; I should see to that. And I should like to be good to your poor little girl. What a beautiful moonlit night! Give me your arm, Anthony, and let us walk up and down for a moment, among all the gaslamps."

He did as she bade him, but perhaps she felt the reserve in his hold.

"Oh, I don't want to revive any dead and gone flirtations," she said; "I'm afraid I've had too many since then. But I always liked you, and I'm sorry for you, and I want to give you a bit of advice, unasked. Of course you're miserable; anyone can see that in your face—which Eveline approved of. And of course one can understand your being miserable, after your terrible loss. But mark my

words, you're just the man to mix up misery and enjoyment till you don't know which is which. It's the greatest mistake a human being can make; they're both good enough, and right enough, if only you keep them apart. Once mix them up, and misery is bound to swallow up everything else. It's like wine in water to some people, or the lean kine in Genesis, or—dear me, that's a very striking pelisse!"

"Don't interrupt me:—as I was saying, stop enjoying your sorrow at once. Come here to Monte Carlo; you shall have your mornings to yourself and the mountains; and your evenings you can dedicate to us and the 'tapis vert.' Then, later on, you *must* come up to London and see people. I really do feel for you; you know I've got a heart of a kind. But no reasonable man's life is only a love-story. 'And the heart of Edward Gray' is rubbish, really. It's absurd, your not knowing people. Besides, you can meet artists and

cranks enough in London, if you like—I'm sure Eveline does; in *any* circumstances you would ultimately have tired of Thurdles. I don't want to be impertinent, but, believe me, when people have made a mess of their lives, they always find it out, and always as a big surprise, and always too late. Besides—frankly—you owe it to your daughter. There, I shall not say a word more about *that*, but just leave you to think it out.

"What?" he asked, with the irritation of a clever man who knows he is saying something stupid. "Would you want me already to find suitors for Margie?"

"Look at your brother," she continued, "he understands life, as I take it. He is making a splendid career for himself in the House. If he live long enough, he will die Lord Stawell."

He laughed, half amused, half annoyed, for none of us like to see our brother's suc-

cesses confronted with our failures—and she knew it.

“Is it really Lady Mary Dellys speaking,” he said—“the daughter of a dozen earls?”

She flushed angrily. “Of two dozen,” she answered; “I suppose there was a first Chevalier du Lys, was there not? Shall we walk towards the hotel? You needn’t talk as if Sir Henry were a cheesemonger, like poor Thomas’s alderman grandpapa, of whom he once used to be so proud. I take life as I find it, a rough diamond; it wants a good deal of glitter to improve it. I have made Thomas a good wife on the whole; in marrying him I did my duty to—to everybody. Of course he has oceans of money, the one thing you really need nowadays. Eveline, who probes most things, could tell you that.”

“Surely Miss Hunt doesn’t care about money?”

“Of course not. She ‘despises’ it. She is compelled, however, to notice that some

men take a different view. She will have £5000 a year at her marriage, and who knows how much in the end? She is one of the biggest heiresses, and, really, my greatest anxiety is, Anthony, that—some day—she should marry an honourable, disinterested man, a man who would understand and direct her many noble aspirations and—and enjoy her peculiarities.” Lady Mary paused on the hotel steps. “She can’t marry one of our society-idiot. Or one of the people here—the barons who steal your pocket-book at a party, or the princes who are wanted by everyone, including the police. Do you know, the dear Duchess played against the table to-night, and was rather unlucky! Now good-bye till to-morrow, and remember what I said!”

He had hardly taken a few steps, when she recalled him: “Do you know, I quite forgot! Colonel Coxe tells me the Prince is coming after all, for the carnival! He is quite sure they can manage it. So we shall all be so

gay; you will have a magnificent time!" He murmured some acknowledgment. "Is that all?" she exclaimed pettishly. "No, decidedly, you and I would never have done for each other!"

He wound down along the broad sweep to the station steps, amid the soft shrubberies and the moonlight. Crowds of people were leaving the gambling-rooms, all elegant, a trifle noisy, in a rustle of silks. With some difficulty he found a seat in the train, and had to abandon it at once to a lady. He took his stand, amongst others, in the long gangway, looking out to the splendid curves of illuminated Mediterranean as the slow line of over-filled cars crept away along the coast. He barely heard snatches of talk about losing and winning; he barely noticed the diversity of attitudes, apathetic or truculent. Beside him, in the half-light, a little man pulled out a cigar-case, gold, with a coronet in diamonds, and, replacing it in an inner pocket, began

cautiously buttoning his coat. Anthony, observing the movement, edged away with a smile.

Yes, he loathed the place. Whatever might be the exaggeration of her manner, Eveline Hunt was right in her verdict. The whole thing was hideous, most loathable, in its beautiful, blood-sodden attractions; loathable in the people who worked it, and the people who came. Most of all, in the people who came. Why, the "people who came" formed the *whole* of cosmopolitan "society." Lady Mary had truly informed him that everyone who is anyone was here. It was the world which had pleased him for a moment that evening, the world Lady Mary had praised, while she scorned it—the life she had advised as a refuge against sorrow! Oh, sweet, oh, sacred sorrow! Oh, sweet, pure memory—on which each word of Lady Mary Hunt fell like a stain!

It was not till he had nearly reached his

hotel on the Promenade des Anglais that he suddenly realised, or fancied he realised, the full meaning of Lady Mary's allusions to her plans for her step-daughter. The suggestion struck him crimson with indignation, again and again. He crossed over from the shiny waterside to the shadow of the houses. In his present revulsion the very thought was an insult. Poor Lady Mary, whose only aspiration was always to be comfortable and kind!

He sank on his knees by the child's bed, and caught her little face to his lips, and kissed it with abundance of kisses. She awoke, crying out in the dark, with mingled satisfaction and fear, "Mamma!"

As that word fell—a revelation—on his soul, the widower, for the first time in all the long, desolate months, burst into tears. The child leant up against him, weeping also. "Don't, papa," she sobbed; "I will be attentive. I wanted to tell you, I will be attentive. Don't, papa, don't!"

"Hush," he said, mastering himself.
"Hush, dear, hush!"

And they kissed each other, now slowly, caressingly, in that dark corner, in the shadow of the night-lamp.

"Margie," he whispered presently, "what made you cry out like that? Do you think of mamma still, Margie? Do you sometimes want her back?"

"Think of her!" repeated the child, indignantly, troubled, catching at that one idea. And again she began to cry, more vehemently, with anger in her tears.

"Hush, little one, hush! We will think of her together, Margie. "We will want her back together." He rose to his feet. "But she won't come!"

He soothed her, saw her fall asleep again with the drops on her lashes, bent softly to remove them, and left her in peace. He had always imagined that "a child would forget what you wished it to"; that "out of sight,

out of mind, was the rule with a child." Now, carried to the other extreme, he unconsciously measured Margie's regrets by his own, and he reproached himself for his futile endeavour to rob the child of a treasure legitimately as much hers as her father's. "I have acted towards Margie," he reflected, "as Lady Mary would act towards me."

He stood at his bedroom window, looking out on the sleeping Gomorrah; all his thoughts were of the woman in heaven, his child, and his art-work; love, sweetness, sad serenity, and far-away light.

Next morning, he wrote to Lady Mary that he was leaving Nice for good.

CHAPTER VI.

CROSSING into Italy from the Riviera is like coming out of a music-hall into the starlit night.

For the moment, in his change of mood, the painter asked nothing of life but that it should let him alone. The oarsman who has shot the rapids may justly claim to rest upon his oars. And gradually there sank around him that appeasement which emanates from splendid and dignified decay. For, if there be a witness on earth that death is beautiful, because manifestly living, as all death surely must be, it is Italy, the heir of the ages, the child of the gods. And, if the chronicles of human virtue glow with the wonder of dead saints whose touch can raise the dead, the his-

tory of human inspiration tells of a sleeping mother from whose paps all the children of man have drawn fire. A new horizon spread clear before the traveller; a pure air enfolded him on every side. From one stronghold of hidden beauties he passed to another; in places unsought by the tourist he lingered entranced. He himself did not realise how his sorrow grew tranquil in this daily enjoyment of the purest and noblest sensations our world can bestow, nor did he fully understand that again there had come to him a calm pleasure in living, from the very heart of this art-loving people—a people, remote from our cult of vulgarity, whose desires, be they virtuous or vicious, are set upon fairer possessions than the pig-prizes of our greasy scramble up the pole! But once more he amply developed an early conviction that, whatever men may babble about modern education, two influences, incomparable and consistent, confer on the human mind a freemasonry of refinement

—the study of the classics, and the appreciation of Italy.

And the love of his art awoke and cried out. He stopped buzzing from one flower to another, and settled down in a Florentine villa on the Viale dei Colli, the house of an English lady, who most willingly acceded to his proposal that he, his child and the governess, should be her only guests. Here he lived, working hard, learning to paint, with a heart become, in all this matter of picture-making, like that of a little child. Of course, he had visited Italy before his marriage; he had toured it; he had seen it. He had seen nothing. The scales were fallen from his eyes.

With his small daughter he entered into close companionship, and in their daily walks he taught and learnt. Between them the dead wife and mother had become a living bond. From the moment when that fictitious silence of his careful building had been broken down—when the father had seen the futility

of his effort to make all things new—from that moment, the love which was not dead resumed its rightful position, the living, loving memory arose in the sanctuary crowned with living flowers. Anthony now spoke often to the child of her mother, spoke of that mother's example, her habits, her endeavours, her tastes. It became a rule of little Margaret's life, even more than her father realised, to do things because mother had done them, in the way mother would have done them, as far as possible. She knew a great deal about mother now from her father's constant references. She liked to hear about her, to put questions, and ponder replies, in their long summer rambles, in their winter chats beside the blazing logs, grown less sentimental now in more natural expansion, in the natural conception of a memory which was no longer a dream.

Nobody who knows anything of human-

ity will believe that Mrs. Fosby approved of the turn things had taken. She possibly might never have exactly "approved," but she certainly could have been content with less cause for reprobation. She wrote Anthony urgent, repeated appeals. The closed mansion was going to rack and ruin (though she aired it as constantly as her grievances). Sir Henry Stollard was having a brilliant (and *most* useful) career, and the county was disappointed in Anthony. The "county" was Mrs. Fosby's divine oracle in all things, but it must be admitted that Mrs. Fosby herself often figured as the oracle's self-constituted voice. The education dear Margaret was receiving was not such as poor dear Margaret (these confusions are inevitable in our family, etc.) would have wished. Mrs. Fosby was an authority on all poor dear Margaret's likes and dislikes. No greater testimony could be adduced to the dead woman's tact and tenderness than is implied in the fact that she

had left this impression behind her. The impression was not Anthony's, but then Anthony had never understood his wife.

Anthony, as Mrs. Fosby put it in the intimate silence of her own little sitting-room, "had been offended with his wife for dying." Could anything be more monstrous? Oh, of course, he had never so expressed it to anyone, but he had run out of the house and the country, refusing to bury the poor innocent thing. "Why, my dear, I call it pique."

In Anthony's heart there had, indeed, arisen, as we have seen, a tender resentment against all he most deeply loved and revered, an emotion too delicate for any Mrs. Fosby to appreciate, but which that good lady unwittingly helped him to overcome.

It was she who, rummaging in drawers which Anthony fondly believed to be locked to all others as they had ever been to himself, came upon an envelope bearing the inscription, "For my husband, when I am dead."

This she forwarded to the Riviera, and it followed the widower to Genoa, where he opened it, one silver evening, in his still hotel room, above the white sweep of the port.

“My dear, dear Husband,” wrote Margaret,—“When you receive this, you will be alone. For some months I have known that I am dying of a fatal disease. I asked the doctor to tell me, me only, so do not be angry with him. There was no need that you should suffer beforehand. Your sufferings will begin, poor husband, when mine are over. I did not think we could have borne the slow separation. If I have been impatient sometimes of late, forgive me.

“You will not really be alone, although at first you may think so. And, besides, you will have Margie. She will grow up to be your companion. Make her happy, as you have made me. Make her happy—and good. Good-bye. God be with you. Good-bye.

“YOUR OWN MARGARET.”

“ Oh! I want to stay! I want to stay! ”

He laid down the paper, and stood gazing at the domes and steeples in the distance. Church-spires! And the pale blue heaven beyond them! Why mourn ye as they that have no hope?

“ If I have been impatient sometimes.” No, she had never been impatient. But what long strain of silent fortitude looked out from under those few words! And in the face of Paradise and all the “consolations of religion,” oh, the human right of fruitless rebellion!

He could think no more. He sank down by the open window, with the sullen twinkle of the restless water beneath him, and in an agony of tenderness he prayed unmeaning words to the God whose voice seemed lost in the barren murmurs, whose face seemed vanished from the empty sky.

But that evening, for the first time, at

Margie's reiterated request, he went to the child's room to "kiss her good-night," and be present at her devotions. She had asked for this after his coming to her in the dark at the Nice hotel; during these ensuing days he had not found courage to comply, for he was acquainted with Margie's prayers, unsophisticated yet stereotype, like all children's. The usual "Oh! God bless," and then the procession of her whole small world defiling before the great White Throne, with herself at the end, in the habit of a penitent, "and bless me and make me good, Amen."

If children reflect much about their daily petitions, they must conclude it a strange thing that none but themselves should require a change for the better—no wonder they fancy all grown-ups are pious—and also, they must become astounded at the hopeless depravity which requires such continuous and ("Oh! you *are* a naughty girl!") such apparently fruitless appeal.

In Margie's procession, animals had been included—a small Noah's Ark. Nurse Lin-tot had early attempted to quash this innovation as irreverent; but her charge's hard reasoning, that "if she loved Joey, she might pray for him," had caused the case to be referred to a higher tribunal which permitted all things in reverence and love. But complications were not long in asserting themselves. Joey repeatedly misbehaved on the nursery carpet, and his young mistress, then aged five, insisted upon removing him from his rank in the procession and placing him next to herself at the end. The non-conversion of Joey was one of the queerest conundrums of her young religious life, until her patient mother showed her by what marvellous blending of counsel and conscience, of punishment and practice, even the will of a little dog slowly turns to the right.

Now, however, the mother's wise voice was still. Miss Gray feebly sought to con-

vince her small pupil that alterations were desirable in these childish petitions. But, like many another before her, the girl vehemently refused to omit the best-loved name of all. She sat up in her bed.

“Mamma is dead”—with a gulp—“isn’t she, Miss Gray?”

“Yes, dear; you know she is.”

“Well, that means she’s alive, doesn’t it? only not on earth—that’s what Nurse Lintot says. And Nurse Lintot must know better’n you, because all her family’s dead, and you’ve got a lot of relations.”

“Ye—e—es, but——”

“If mamma’s alive, I shall pray for her. I stopped praying for Joey, because papa said that when little dogs are dead they are really dead.”

Which shows that the reflective Anthony could, on occasion, be as apodictic as Mrs. Fosby. And so can all of us when we are called upon to affirm more than we know.

But, night after night, to hear the child praying for the dead mother, so mysteriously passed away—gone—was almost more than the father could bear.

“Papa, I want to ask you something,” said Margie. “I’ve wanted to ask you for a long time. I want to ask you if something’s wrong.”

“Well, Margie?”

“I’ve got nobody else to ask, you see. I always used to ask mamma. I s’pose you know?”

“Know what?”

“What’s right and what’s wrong. Mamma always did, at once.” Margie nodded her curly head with much energy, rocking to and fro, a white figure, in the white bed.

“Oh—yes! I hope so. Do you never ask Miss Gray?”

“Oh, no!”—horizontal nods—“I mean, sometimes. But Miss Gray says she must think about it. So I s’pose she looks it out

in a book. Like when I asked her what was the capital of Servia! I caught her then." And Margie laughed heartily.

"Hush, Margie, you wouldn't have known what was the capital of Servia if I hadn't told you. And I don't believe even now you remember the name of the chief place in Montenegro!"

"But that isn't my question, papa," replied Margie, adroitly. "I want to ask you," and she dropped her voice and sidled up against the railing of her cot. "Is it wrong? After everyone's gone, and you've tucked me in, I say a little prayer to myself, 'Please God, make mamma happy in heaven'"—and suddenly Margie began to cry.

"Yes, it's right," said the father, wildly, and he went out. The door of the opposite room closed as he opened his; he caught the words, "*Tiens, la petite du veuf qui pleure!*" "Pity!" he said angrily, to himself. "Pity everywhere! God alone is pitiless." But as

he said the words, their unreasonableness struck home to him, and he understood how much the mercy of God must be above the pity of men. He went back to the child's room. "Darling," he said softly, "I think mamma is happy in heaven. I don't think she wanted to leave us, but I think she is happy now, for I think God has told her a great many things that you and I don't know."

"I thought you knew everything," said Margie.

A child lives in episodes; its thoughts follow in dots; its emotions apparently lie side by side. That this is so we have all been taught when we grew up and grew sensible, yet we rarely realise it in our intercourse with the children around us. At its best that intercourse is always laborious; so few of us have been children ourselves.

For the next fortnight, Margie remained

entirely engrossed in the delight of confecting clay pottery and getting it baked—a mystery into which she had been initiated by the pitiful French lady opposite. A considerable period elapsed during which she never referred to her mother at all, and Anthony, whose reflections were now purely tender, found himself craving for a far fuller sympathy than Margie could ever have bestowed. To a nature such as his, a young child's participation in its sorrow could convey little comfort, but rather increase of pain.

They had gone on to Siena. One evening, their walk being over, they were standing on the market-place there, behind the Palazzo Publico, with their backs turned to the untidy ascent of buildings and their eyes gazing down across the vast extent of plain. In the distance, rain-shadowed, hung the hills. Margie, who had insisted on taking her skipping-rope, now stood still, her cheeks flushed, her eyes far away.

"If I could only see her face for just one teeny moment, I should *know*," she said, suddenly, with vehemence.

Anthony started, but made no reply.

"Papa, I always knew at once whether mamma was pleased or not."

"She would be pleased with you, Margie; you try to be good."

"I don't mean that," said Margie, marching off.

"Margie, Margie, take care! Good heavens, child, do look where you're going; you were very nearly over the side!"

Margie withdrew her gaze from the great emptiness above her. Miss Gray had recently told her the Struwelpeter story of the school-boy who was eaten by fishes; she had been vastly offended, but from her father such misconceptions were not to be endured.

"I can't help looking up, when I'm out walking," she said. "In all the pictures, in the churches, there's always lots of people

looking out of Heaven. Papa, does God *never* look out, now, as He did in Moses's time and Michel Angelo's? "

"Not for us to see Him," said Anthony.

"But Michel Angelo saw Him dozens of times, and he didn't live so long ago, you said. It isn't like Moses, who died before grandma was born. She told me. And there's such a lot of Heaven here in places; doesn't one little angel ever look out any more, papa? "

"And what would you do with the angels, child? "

"Why, if mamma could only look out for one minute, half a minute, only half a minute, I should know if she was happy up there."

"Ah, if she could—what would we not ask! "

Margie shook her head with a solemn smile of superiority.

"How could she hear us, papa? She couldn't hear us up *there!* But I sha'n't need to ask anything. I shall just see her face and

know. Do you know, papa, there's a thing I'm most afraid of; it makes me quite *wretched* sometimes. I could cry all day."

"What is it, Margie?"

"I don't want to tell you. You won't laugh?"

"Laugh!"

"I'm so afraid, when she does look out at last, *I* sha'n't be looking! And I can't look up all day, papa, like the children in the pictures. You can't unless you're a picture, and even a lot of those are looking away at the people come to see. But, with them it wouldn't matter, because there's others looking. But I can't keep on long; Miss Gray wouldn't let me. And besides, it hurts my neck."

"Margie——"

"Oh! I wonder how it was in the picture days!"

"Listen, Margie; you will never see your mother looking down from Heaven."

“ But, papa——”

“ Never. All the same, I believe she does look down. And her face, though you cannot see it, will be happy if she sees you happy and good.”

She turned away from the immense landscape and walked on quickly: he could see that she was struggling with herself.

Presently she stopped and swept one small hand, with skipping-rope attached, across the dull grey vault, far and wide above them, from which the last lurid lines were fading in the west.

“ Then nobody has *ever* seen the angels in the sky?” she asked, but the interrogation in her voice was perfunctory. “ Oh, papa, I never want you to show me any of the beautiful pictures again! Oh papa, what is that little boy doing? Tell him not to beat that dear little dog!”

So the first seeds of doubt were sown in Margie's heart, doubt of her father, who had

more than once rashly declared that the great painters painted what they saw; doubt of the marvellous Bible stories, which of course *must* be true, though apparently they weren't; doubt of all human certitude, where the grown-ups invented, made up, fairy-tale angels, just as children and their dolls make believe to be grown-ups. That doesn't make them grown-ups.

For a long time Anthony hesitated whether he should abandon his impulsive resolve never again to let the child behold a likeness of the mother they had left in the boudoir at Thurdles. There existed no portrait of Margaret deserving the name. They had quitted their home with nothing but the clothes on their backs: he had no wish to write for anything, least of all for photographs he abhorred. Let the child, if unreality there must be, imagine a fair unreality of her own. Nature herself, often unwise perhaps, but always invincible, had frustrated his design of

oblivion—he now set himself to build up, for the child even more than for himself, a beautiful fancy, a vague splendour, shrouded and aureoled in death.

So they travelled, seeing, studying—striving, as most of us do, to think of something else. And so they settled at Florence, and lived on in study and sight-seeing, as do the best of us, and in thinking of something else. And gradually, on the father's heart there deepened a devotion, hitherto undreamed, to his work, and on the daughter's a cult of all that is righteous and lovely, embodied in her vision of the dead.

CHAPTER VII.

FOUR years passed thus uneventfully at Florence, or among the neighbouring hills. During that period Anthony never once went northward. Why should he? Soon it had become to him an insupportable vexation to recall, and far more to revisit, home scenes. He had few near relations or connections; such as he possessed had but rarely come his way. None of them disturbed his Italian seclusion. Sir Henry was far too much occupied in England; Mrs. Fosby had a hard-and-fast rule of her own about "awaiting an invitation," and meanwhile confined herself to voluminous epistolary protest, advice, consolation, appeal. Anthony painfully replied. The child was healthy here, happy, well-cared for, well taught. Delicate by nature, she had taken

kindly to the climate. Her mother had often discussed with him the desirability of wintering abroad. If he returned at all, it must be to Oakshire, to Rusborough, to Thurdles. Why should he take a step so utterly distasteful without adequate cause?

So he stayed where he was, and, having posted his letters, returned to his painting. He no longer sent pictures to the Academy.

The child would sit in the studio and watch him. His subjects were now all Italian, chiefly Italian female saints. He painted slowly, pausing to learn. The child, sometimes weary of watching, would get up and arrange things, till his fingers itched with irritation. She had no artistic instinct: she could be absolutely trusted never to drop anything, never to upset anything, never to place anything right. All her likes were straight: knick-knacks stood on her table, as on a stall. And Miss Gray had taught her to be neat.

There was an empty inner room behind the studio into which Margie liked to wander. In early days she had dubbed it hers, and played make-believe it was "England," without any sense or sequence, as children do. To her chagrin he locked it one morning, and told her he must have it for himself. It became an understood thing that no one, not even Margie, might disturb him when he passed into that room.

On one spring morning of his fourth year at Florence an imperious knock sounded on the silence of his sanctum, and an imperious voice he did not recognise called his name. Annoyed and astonished, he slipped through the door, and confronted an excited young lady.

"Surely you remember me?" she said, speaking hurriedly. "We met at Monte Carlo. I am Eveline Hunt. Somebody downstairs—I suppose it's the landlady—said I

couldn't come up, but I pushed her aside. When one human creature is in need of another, it's ridiculous to talk of disturbance. There she is! Please, Mr. Stollard, send her away."

He obeyed wonderingly, and suggested that his visitor should sit down.

But Eveline Hunt remained standing in the middle of the room.

"You must forgive me," she said; "I suppose I appear rude. I haven't the slightest desire to be rude. Your little daughter met me on the stairs—she said she was your daughter—and told me to go back. A nice child. I liked her for that."

"My dear young lady, I am at your service. But pray take this seat."

"Tell me, Mr. Stollard, you loved your wife, did you not?" Anthony's eyes grew hard.

"Yes," he said.

"I know you did. Haven't I, a hundred

times, heard Lady Mary call you romantic? Let her laugh! I believe if she ever loved anyone, it was you!”

“My dear Miss Hunt, I must beg of you——” cried Anthony in distress.

“Oh, loved *à la* Lady Mary, I mean. Nothing to weep over. I should certainly not betray heart secrets, but I don’t possess hers—if she’s got any. However, I haven’t come here to speak of Lady Mary, but of myself. *I* had a heart secret. It’s everybody’s secret now!” Her voice trembled: tears brimmed across her passionate eyes: she dashed them back. “Let me tell you everything calmly. I am not a flirt, Mr. Stollard, but, of course, when I came out, men proposed to me—there is no glory in that; I am part of a bank. I said ‘no’ once or twice, when my father and Lady Mary would have liked me to say ‘yes.’ All that is very natural—everybody knows as much; but I wanted”—her voice drooped, and so did her eyelids, her hands, her head—

"I wanted to say 'yes,' on one occasion, when my father insisted on my saying 'no.'"

A moment of silence ensued. Anthony did not stir.

"I did just as they wished, and there was no more talk of the matter. He was an artist: he—had given me lessons. He was terribly poor. I heard no more of him for some months, until, three days ago, I learnt from a friend that he was in Florence, dying." Again she stopped. The room was quite still. The bright sun poured down into it. "And so I came here."

"Alone?" exclaimed Anthony. She turned on him angrily, her pent-up emotion thus finding vent.

"Did you expect me to wait for Lady Mary?" she cried.

"Well, so be it. I will help you to find him. And then we will see what can be done."

"I needed no help to find him," she said, and her pale face grew suffused with colour.

"He is lying in a garret not far from here, too ill to be moved."

"And you want me to go to him to assist him? I shall be very pleased to do so. For the present it would hardly be prudent to tell him you are here."

"I have been with him all night."

The room seemed more silent than ever, the sunlight more glaring.

"Oh, Miss Hunt, how could you—— But forgive me. He is very ill you say?"

"He cannot possibly live much longer." Anthony checked a faint gasp of what might almost have sounded like relief.

"I am *very* sorry," he said; "but, now, what is it you want me to do?"

"I want you to recommend me to your landlady, to take me under your protection, to let me live here and go to him from here unmolested until—all is over. Then I want you to let me go away unmolested. That is all."

He sprang to his feet and paced up and

down the room, in the painful, sun-lit silence. At last he stopped before her.

"You are ruining your life," he said. She looked up at him, and, grown suddenly calm:

"What a foolish remark," she said scornfully. "It sounds very clever, but it really means nothing. My life is ruined already."

"Oh, you mustn't say that!" he cried. Then his voice grew very serious: "Into some few lives there does come at an early stage the—how shall I call it?—the irretrievable. If it must come, it must. But, for God's sake, let it come of itself!"

She bent her head on her hands that he might not see it. Then she looked up again.

"Don't be afraid: I'm not going to cry," she said. "It's no use talking, I can't help myself. I must comfort him these few days. You can't think how little life looks, face to face with death."

"Oh, I know that!" he exclaimed pas-

sionately. "And life remains little—and long."

She sat ruminating these words. At last she asked:

"You think I am acting wrong?"

"I do not wish to say that; only——"

She rose, and her glance swept round the Italian saints, half finished, just begun, upon easels against the walls. Their faces were calm and symmetrical: they all looked very pure and good.

"Would you have me go *back*?" she exclaimed. "You—what do you care for social considerations? What do you give for Lady Mary's advice, or Sir Henry's career, or Mrs. Fosby's reproaches? I came to you, naturally, as to a man who listens just to the voice of his heart, a man who doesn't 'reside' in this world but who lives in it, a man—oh, my God!—who dares to be wretched, dares to suffer—so few men have the courage to be weak!"

“ But then I am a man, as you say——” began Anthony, endeavouring to calm her.

“ Yes, I know. That is your universal excuse for doing wrong—or doing right. We women can do neither: we can only do as usual! Mr. Stollard, I haven’t come here to air my poor ‘ fads,’ as my step-mother calls them. I have come here to do a good action: you must help me to accomplish it. I can manage my bad actions alone.”

“ Surely he could be sufficiently cared for,” expostulated Anthony. “ If you gave me his name—we have an excellent society——”

“ Don’t,” she said. “ Oh, yes, charity could bring him broth—which he can’t swallow.”

“ I would rather he died to-night,” she cried, and began pacing the room, “ than that Christian charity should touch him! Oh, I know your excellent society, that is born of our social crimes! Here too, in Florence, of course—that the nine-tenths may safely go

unto Cæsar—you pay your dime to God! Oh, I know of your props and your plasterings! Of how many societies is Lady Mary not Patroness and President? Your ‘succour’ shall not touch him, do you hear?” She turned upon Anthony furiously. “He isn’t ‘indigent’: all the jewels I have with me are his!”

Anthony stood watching her with a puzzled expression. He was quite willing to like her, to pity her more.

“And you will assist me in disposing of them to the cheats on the Ponte Vecchio,” she added. She heaved a big bored sigh.

“Let us speak to Mrs. Thomson,” he said; “at any rate, you must find some place wherein you can spend this night.”

She stood thinking, a graceful figure, in her contempt.

“Very well,” she said. “The world is idiotic. I can go to him all day.”

That evening Lady Mary arrived in Flor-

ence, and immediately sent for Anthony to her hotel. She had grown a little stouter in these four years; she looked very handsome and flurried.

"Applaud me," she said immediately. "I have risen to the occasion. Whatever may happen, I have done my duty. I am here."

"Miss Hunt is safely housed with a respectable widow," answered Anthony.

"That is excellent, but it is unimportant. Miss Hunt is staying at the Grand Hôtel Victoria, which is full of English tourists, even at this season. She accompanied Lady Mary Hunt, who was suddenly called to the death-bed of an aged relative—a connection of the Hunt family. My relatives are too well known! That will be in all the papers tomorrow." Lady Mary sighed.

"And nobody will believe it," she added. She looked away wistfully, through the window, to the darkling river.

"I was to have dined with the Prince on

Friday next," she said, "at the Duchess of Dorrisford's. Nobody will believe it." She brightened up. "Do you know, I am proud of that stroke about the English tourists," she said. "It will please the poor hotel keepers; there's not a soul in the house!" She threw up her hands. "I am ready to do anything," she said. "I shall order light mourning, though heliotrope never suited me! I am willing to advertise Miss Octavia Hunt in the Times—I think 'Octavia' looks well. In the middle of the season, I will spend a week, anywhere! But it's dreadful to think that it's all of no use. People always know."

Anthony was too conscious of this fact; he could offer no consolation.

"You might say they didn't," she exclaimed, laughing hastily. "But they do. I am never quite sure whether the farce one gets up over every tragedy is worth playing. But 'tis a traditional rule to have a sort of *lever de rideau*. They always do at all the courts when

a royal personage commits suicide, or elopes, or does anything; first there's a make-believe, and then comes the piece! So I suppose it's the wisest thing to do, or *they* wouldn't do it. Poor Eveline!"

"But there's nothing much amiss now you've come," suggested Anthony soothingly.

"Oh, no, nothing much. Only that Miss Eveline Hunt has run away to live with her drawing-master! All the way to Florence! Five thousand a year ought to get over that!" She spoke with great bitterness, her hands trembled. "And she merely fell in love with this man from pique. In one season five husbands presented themselves, all more or less desirable. The last was Lord—well, never mind; she has the slightest obliquity of vision; her father was very anxious she should take him, so she said she would marry the first lover with regular features. She has always been like this. It is very diverting, I dare say,

but it doesn't answer. Eveline tries to be original; that is stupider, though less dangerous, than being born queer. Elle n'a pas besoin de courir après l'esprit pour attraper la bêtise."

"Lady Mary, you exaggerate!"

"A painter!"

"You forget that I am an artist."

"Oh, nonsense! So is Thomas. He's got some things hanging in his dressing-room he did at school, as a boy! He's exceedingly proud of them. They're dreadfully poor. But, then, you see, *he* isn't. I know you paint very well. So does the Empress Victoria. Painting as an accomplishment is of course very different from painting as a profession."

"Art is not a thing anyone need be ashamed of, as long as it is second-rate," said Anthony angrily.

"Don't be silly. And now go and fetch me Eveline. We must meet, the sooner the

better, and I think your presence will be an advantage."

"If you are hard on the girl, I shall take her part."

"Of course. How prettily you put it. But I am not nearly as 'hard' as her own father, who, being a cheesemonger's grandson, takes up the matter far more strongly than I. He asked me the other day, in Eveline's presence, whether, if *I* had married my drawing-master, my father would not have thought the family everlastingly disgraced? Veracity compelled me to answer 'no.' He asked me what the devil I meant, and really I found it impossible to explain." Again she laughed softly, and rubbed her trembling hands.

"Well, I shall do my best," said Anthony, rising.

"Oh, do wait a moment! I enjoy talking to you, and I get the chance once in four years. What I like is your air of indifference,

while, in reality, you catch every 'nuance.' With you it is the real thing. You are absurd, Anthony—you are impossible—I tell you frankly! You play at being a Bohemian, and at bottom you are an old-fashioned English gentleman. *You* an artist-person like Mr. Geoffrey Strainge! Why, the honour of any woman would be safe in your hands! I believe you go regularly to the English church here on Sundays, with your little daughter, and her English nurse! Oh, I know I'm old-fashioned now! You were born to be an English squire, a J. P. and Member of Parliament. And I wish you were, instead of wasting your time at Florence, painting English bread-and-butter saints. There, don't express your anger in words. And fetch me my poor lover of art—and artists. Poor girl! Poor girl! What a mess you clever people make of your lives!"

Eveline was not at the Pension. It was a

good thing that Anthony, on recommending her to his landlady, had insisted on knowing the address of the sick artist, as well as his name. He now hastened thither, and found the house in a narrow by-street off the narrow street where once Dante's father lived.

The painter's room was at the top of the house. Anthony knocked, and Eveline opened the door. "You will wake him," she said with irritation, "he is asleep."

Anthony answered: "Lady Mary has arrived and wants you to come to her."

"I have no objection," replied the girl; "but at this moment, you will admit, Lady Mary is quite a secondary consideration."

"But you promised——"

"I keep my promises. I am waiting for a Sister of Mercy; she ought to have been here before."

Anthony advanced into the garret—it was hardly more. The "drawing-master" lay in a shaded corner. "I shall stay till the Sister

comes," said Eveline. "Will you stay too? I don't want to be ungrateful. Thank you for coming to look for me." She resumed her seat, and her empty hands fell into her lap. They sat facing each other speechless, for ten minutes, in the dusk.

"Would you like to see his face?" asked Eveline at last.

"Don't let us disturb him," replied Anthony, who could wait.

But she took up the paraffin lamp and advancing held it aloft. "She loves the event, not the man," repeated Anthony again, perhaps unjustly. He caught a glimpse of a delicate countenance, white and black among the pillows, in that moment. "He is dead!" shrieked the girl; the petroleum lamp crashed past him, extinguished by the swiftness of its fall. They were in darkness; a strong odour spread around them. The sick man started up in bed with a cry. The girl sank down beside him, her arms about his neck. An-

thony could hear her kisses, her fondlings: "My darling, it is nothing! It is nothing! The lamp was upset. Oh, I thought that you were dead!"

"I wish I were," said the sick man.

Anthony smiled: the saying, so natural, so stupid, characterised the artist at once—and the whole story, conquest, devotion and all.

"No, no; don't say that: it hurts me. You're not going to die, Geoffrey. People don't die of love."

"No, but they do of starvation," replied Geoffrey grimly. "And also, I believe, of the smell of paraffin oil. And I was asleep! Heavens, to think that I was asleep at last! I do wish you had stayed in England."

Before she could answer, the door opened, and the Italian Sister of Mercy stood asking what had occurred. She brought in a dirty little lantern from the passage.

"Good God, it is a wonder you are not

"all killed!" she muttered. Fortunately the lamp had fallen on a rug by the bed; this she dragged away, and as she cleaned up the mess: "Good God," she said again, "what a nurse!"

The sick man had sunk back exhausted: under her gentle touches he once more dozed off. "The signor is better," she said, feeling his pulse; "the fever is gone. The morning's amelioration maintains itself."

"Better!" exclaimed Anthony, aghast—horrified at himself. She turned to him in astonishment.

"My coming has saved him," said Eveline with fervour. "Great Heaven, what a happiness! And what a responsibility!"

"He is asleep now," said Anthony, bewildered. "The Sister will watch by him. Come with me to Lady Mary!"

"I have no objection," said the girl again, mechanically; "but Lady Mary, you must admit, just now looks so absurdly unimportant."

“Yes, yes, go and sleep,” said the Sister sweetly. Eveline moved to the door; suddenly, with a splendid sweep of her tall figure, she bent towards the bed and kissed the sleeper softly on the forehead. Then, looking the Sister straight in the eyes:

“E il mio fidanzato,” she said.

CHAPTER VIII.

“Et, après?” said Lady Mary. She looked from her step-daughter to Stollard, and back to her step-daughter. In the silence the clock struck ten.

“I should say, ‘bed,’” replied Eveline provokingly.

“So would any ostrich,” retaliated Lady Mary, “take the next step; ’tis a very easy philosophy, especially when the next step is wrong. But I congratulate you, Eveline; few people manage to drop a paraffin lamp without setting fire to a good deal, including themselves.”

“There, you see,” said Eveline.

“What am I to see? The worst thing that can happen is not always an explosion; stains, for instance”—she pointed to Eveline’s ulster

—"are worse in their way; they last for ever."

"Not paraffin stains," replied Eveline pertly, "you are thinking of oil."

"For goodness sake let us drop metaphor, I have never pretended to be your equal in cleverness. In talk you are past mistress, Eveline. I cry mercy. But now the moment has come to act. To-morrow, of course, you go back."

"Of course," said Eveline.

"To London," said Lady Mary.

"To Geoffrey," said Eveline. They spoke the words quite gently. Anthony's heart gave a leap.

"Eveline, you say a great many things you do not mean. So do I." Anthony looked up with dismay at the change in Lady Mary's voice; here was the old note of earnestness that had thrilled him more than twelve years ago in their rare moments of intimacy; he had not heard it since. "But now let us talk

sense. Mr. Strainge, you tell me, is out of danger; you cannot, therefore, in decency, remain with him; the excuse for your sudden visit is gone, and your father expects you at home."

"I am going to marry Mr. Strainge," replied Eveline; "nurse him first, and marry him afterwards. Mr. Stollard knows it is so."

"I beg your pardon," protested Anthony, as Lady Mary turned interrogatively, but Eveline faced him down.

"And do you think," she cried, in blazing indignation, "that, when I kissed him there before you, I did not take him as my husband, once for all? I do not know"—and she veered round to her step-mother—"whether other women kiss the men they don't marry? Not I!"

For a moment she was splendid. The other two, uncomfortably conscious of each other's reminiscences, cowered before her.

"The thing is settled," she said loftily; "I remain here as Geoffrey's wife."

"Then nothing is left for me," said Lady Mary, "but to tell you your father's decision. I detest that sort of thing; it is so irretrievable. If you do not return with me to England, he cuts you off; from henceforth you are dead to him."

"Dear me," said Eveline, white to the lips. "Have you really succeeded in getting that done, Lady Mary? I wish you joy, but admit that I have helped you a bit."

Lady Mary also was white.

"You do me horrible wrong," she said, "but I suppose it's no use talking. Yet you might easily comprehend, that I do not feel the disgrace to the Hunt family as keenly as your father does."

"You need not remind me that you are my step-mother; the fact is evident enough. But I refuse to accept my rejection as a daughter, except from my father's lips."

"You must be content to receive it from his hand," said Lady Mary, and she drew forth a paper. The girl seized it, and read the curt sentence it contained. Her knees sank away under her; with a great effort she rose erect. "My father speaks of his affection, and his fortune," she said. "He evidently thinks I shall regret losing both."

"Both are desirable," said Lady Mary.

"But either, I imagine, suffices," said the girl. Again she looked down splendidly on her step-mother, who quailed before such magnificence of scorn. "There is no more to be said," continued Eveline. "I choose my life. I refuse to marry Lord Farringdale, who possesses every vice I despise and every virtue I dislike. I am of age, and I take as my husband"—she glanced down at the paper she held in her hand—"this fellow, this drawing-master, this Geoffrey Strainge."

"And what will you live on?" asked the lady on the sofa.

“His genius and my love.”

Lady Mary smiled sadly.

“My dear, could you look into my heart, you would be astonished to see how deeply I pity you. I have not your confidence, nor your affection; you would laugh at the kind words I am longing to speak. You have often condemned the comedy of our society life, Eveline; perhaps you are right, but, my dear child, you are making of your own existence a farce—forgive me, if I speak plainly—a farce, with a tragical ending, which nobody will give you due credit for, because it doesn’t fit into the piece.”

“Whatever kind of play my life may be,” said Eveline proudly, “I have come to-night to the transformation scene. I do not impeach the ideals you and all your set have been brought up to; they are the lights of your life; art and love, these are mine! If you do not mind, I should like to retire to my room.”

“Good-night, Eveline. Let us meet to-morrow morning. Believe me, whatever may happen, I will befriend you with your father all I can.”

“Art with a little a, Love with a big L, let us hope,” said Lady Mary, as the door closed on her step-daughter. “Come out of your corner, Anthony. Well, do you approve?”

“Really, it is difficult for me,” replied Anthony, hesitatingly, “to express any authoritative opinion.”

“Oh, if you begin like that, you will end by approving. I don’t. Not that I grudge Eveline her coveted romance. But the romances of real life begin well and end badly. This one is bound to.”

“But, then, you are so unromantic, so matter-of-fact.”

“Am I?” She looked at him wistfully. “Perhaps I am. Then, at least, I avoid being absurd. Absurdity is the one thing I

dread. The fear of absurdity is my dominant sin."

"If she loves him," began Anthony, but the lady interrupted.

"If she loved him! him only, heart and soul, without heed of her own emotions, once for all, and for ever, through sickness and desolation, for life and in death, thinking only of his happiness—if she loved him as one human being loves once in a thousand—oh! unfortunate, oh! most favoured amongst women, who would *dare*——" she broke off, hoarse with the vehemence of that word, unable to proceed.

"And I who just said you were not romantic!" murmured Anthony.

"Every woman is romantic; but I am not sentimental. Besides, I am nearly thirty-five—'nel mezzo del cammino'; that is an apt quotation here, and it is, moreover, the only Dante I know. Oh, except, of course, 'Lasciate ogni speranza,' which is appropriate for

Eveline. Eveline, what a name! Half the fault lies there. If I wanted my daughter to elope with a groom, I should call her Diana."

"Now you are superstitious," protested Anthony.

"Call me whatever you like, but let me go my own way. I tell you, I have seen the world. Nothing succeeds in it except common sense; and that only succeeds because it is so uncommon. I would give my right hand—yes, I know what I am saying—to save Eveline from all the sordid wretchedness with this miserable man. As it is, I can do nothing. And, of course, it is pleasant to have one's right hand where it ought to be. I do not imagine for a moment, as Eveline would, that I should enjoy going about with a stump."

"You think this man will be unkind to her?"

"I think he understands she is an heiress.

But even were matters entirely different——” she paused, looking anxiously at Anthony, struggled to say something, and hesitated, manifestly at war with herself.

“Anthony,” she said softly, and then, pouring forth her words, “you *must* let me speak! You mustn’t mind for once. You’ve got a little girl; I know about her. I’ve been wanting to say this for ever so long, only we never met. And perhaps I should never have dared. But I wanted to say, don’t, don’t let her grow up different. Send her back among her own people. Don’t want her to be peculiar, better, queer. It’s no use talking, women must be ‘usual,’ as Eveline so scornfully says. They *must* have natural surroundings, into which they naturally fit. God pity the woman who is superior to her *entourage*.” She waited for Anthony to protest, but he said nothing.

“It’s my fault about Eveline. When I married, I left her with an aunt in the country

—pure selfishness; I was barely twenty; I didn't want to be bored. Let her stay where she was. The aunt was prim, old-maidish, with a lot of ideas and fads—very good, I daresay: Carlyle's clothes—rubbish, hero-worship, that sort of thing. Eveline believes things are not what they seem. And her aunt called her Eva; and when we sent for her up to London, it was too late." Lady Mary's voice almost broke down under the weight of her self-reproach.

Anthony stood silent in the dimly-lighted room; the atmosphere of gloom hung overpowering, like a thundercloud. At last he said, thickly:

"What do you want me to do with Margie?"

"I have no right to want anything. But, if she were my child, I would return with her to my own people, to my own home. I would let her grow up among surroundings she can retain through life, with child friends, who will

think and grow up as she does. All this is exotic, forcing-house business. You can get plants to turn white, can't you, by keeping them in the dark? But the world is all colours, like healthy flowers. Look at Eveline—she doesn't believe in money; she doesn't believe in rank; she doesn't believe in any of the contemptible things we all believe in!"

Again she turned on him with that sudden recoil of hers. "Do you believe in them? Do I? Yes, as idols, not as gods; all the difference lies there!"

"I can't go back," he stammered.

She held out her hand. "Forgive me, Anthony," she said; "I have no right to take any interest in your daughter. Or in you? But to-night, amid my own scandal and misery, I can't help speaking out. Eveline is going to make herself wretched with a good-for-nothing scamp, because the scamp 'loves the beautiful.' Send Margie to Mrs. Fosby for a

little. Mrs. Fosby is a much better woman than you think. And you are treating her very badly."

He pressed the proffered hand, and went away home.

CHAPTER IX.

HE locked himself into the little inner room—the locking was superfluous—and all that night, through the silence, he painted, he painted.

In the morning, when he came out, his face was discomposed. He noticed this, grimly, too modern not to wash and trim himself before a toilet-glass.

On the stairs he met Margie, coming up to greet him.

“There’s a great stain on your frock,” he said.

“Why, papa, it’s been there a long time. Miss Gray said it wouldn’t show.”

At breakfast, he remarked the governess’s manners, as he had often done. They were

very good; there was nothing you could exactly complain of.

"Margie, you are twelve," he said suddenly.

The child laughed.

"Of course, papa," she said. "How funny! You know I am."

"Margaret is tall for her age," remarked Miss Gray nervously.

"It is a very considerable age," said Anthony. And Margie laughed again.

That afternoon they took their usual walk together, the pair of them. They went up to the Piazzale Michelangiolo, where the bronze David stands. All the way up the father talked of summer flowers, but his thoughts were of one thing only, and he came to that one thing as they stood by the terrace parapet, overlooking the whole panorama of Florence, enjoying for the hundredth time a sight too beautiful for words.

"You like living in Florence, don't you, Margie?"

"Yes, papa," said Margie listlessly, for she was hot, and engrossed in a distant boy with a ball.

"We shall be going to the hills next month. Italy is a beautiful country. You wouldn't like to live anywhere but in Italy, would you?"

"I should like to live in England," said Margie, watching the ball.

Anthony started, as if she had stung him.

After a moment, he said, "Why?"

"Oh, I don't know. I should like to. Miss Gray would like to. She says England's beautiful, too."

"England's all soot," said Anthony wildly. "If you sit down on the grass, you get up with a great black stain. You don't remember England, Margie. You can't imagine what the north is like. The south is God's smile, and the north is God's frown!"

"That boy throws his ball very badly," replied Margie. "Miss Gray says Italian boys are all muffs. Her nephew's the best football player in his school; he broke his arm the other day playing football. When you were young, papa, did you play Association or Rugby?"

"Cricket was more in my line, Margie."

Margie looked supercilious.

"I played in my college eleven," said Anthony, bashfully.

"Oh!" said Margie. "Do you know, papa, I don't understand. Miss Gray says I'm not like regular children."

"Regular children!" ejaculated Anthony between his teeth.

"I thought England was quite jolly," continued Margie. "Miss Gray thinks it beautiful. She's got some verses, she says, about it, very pretty. Shall I repeat them to you?"

"If you like."

Margie leant against the parapet, with the wide splendours of Fiesole and Arno in the sun-blaze before her—

“Christmas in England now.
The holly’s berries red
With merry mistletoe adorn
The peasant’s peaceful shed.”

“It isn’t Christmas now, at any rate!” exclaimed Anthony.

“No, papa, but does that matter?”

“I think it does. And, surely, it’s ‘holly berries.’”

“Miss Gray always says ‘holly’s berries,’” answered Margie, piqued.

“No creature with any poetic sense would say ‘holly’s berries’ there.”

The fundamental trait of Margie Stollard’s whole nature was loyalty. It had been abnormally developed. She stopped short.

“Did mamma not like England?” she presently asked, naturally reverting to the subject they always had in common.

"Yes, certainly, child. And so do I, of course—we all love our country. I was speaking of climate."

"And did mamma never sit on the grass?"

"Good heavens, Margie, you are too horribly matter-of-fact! I cannot comprehend from whom you get that curious persistency. Your mother was imaginative, fanciful, even sentimental."

"I should like to be all that mamma was," said Margaret gravely.

No girl under twenty—no woman, whatever her age—however she may despise sentiment, likes being told she is not sentimental.

"What do you mean exactly, papa? Miss Gray always says she appreciates sentiment. That's what she objects to in the Madonnas; she says there's no sentiment in them. She likes pictures with plenty of sentiment, she says—'The Huguenot' in the schoolroom,

for instance. That, she says, has sentiment."

"Well, I too admire 'The Huguenot' in its way."

"And 'The Derby Day' and 'The Railway Station' she's always talking about. Do you know 'The Railway Station,' papa? She says that's full of sentiment."

"'The Railway Station'? It's the one fault I find with Florence, child. In Florence, at any rate, there ought to be no railway stations. Look at that shadow falling straight across the Ponte alle Grazie."

"But Miss Gray means——"

"My dear child, do leave off discussing Miss Gray. We seem to have talked more about her during this hour than during all the years she has been with us."

Thus snubbed, Margie turned to the landscape, and they walked away, each busy with their own reflections. The Piazzale Galileo

had been reached before Anthony broke the silence.

“Can Miss Gray see the difference, I wonder, between a ‘Madonna’ by Botticelli, and a ‘Madonna’ of Murillo’s?” he said.

Margie looked up in indignant astonishment, but she only replied, “I don’t know. They look very different, papa.”

“After all, what does it matter? She can distinguish between Rugby and Association.”

“Yes, papa. Do you know, I think Association’s best.”

“The ancient Greeks could do both, Margie. But then, they were fine fellows. Fancy sculpting the Apoxyomenos after having beaten him in a race.”

“I thought the Apoxyomenos had been wrestling, papa?”

Anthony heaved a plaintive sigh.

“You remember my jacket that I tore in Rome?” continued Margie. “Miss Gray says I shall have to get a new one.”

Anthony stopped in the middle of the hillside road, and, bending, kissed her.

That evening he sought a little talk with Miss Girling, the landlady's spinster niece, who helped her in the housekeeping. Usually he avoided Miss Girling as much as he civilly could, simply because she bored him, for he was unaware that half-a-dozen courteous words on his part caused much flutter and speculation in a heart essentially youthful and silly, full of vague aspirations sufficiently sentimental to meet any demand.

"Indeed, Margaret is the sweetest child," said Miss Girling.

"And well developed, I think, for her age?"

"She might be stronger," said Miss Girling.

"I mean intellectually," explained the father, with a quick shadow across his face.

“Indeed, she knows twice as much as I did when I was her age, and about all sorts of things. And yet I had the very best education that the very best academy in Clapham could give—Miss Grigson’s the name was—and I had all the extras.”

“I am glad to hear you say that,” replied Anthony, keeping to the point which was of interest to him.

“There are subjects, of course,” continued Miss Girling, “which can be learnt nowhere as they are learnt in England. Deportment, for instance——”

“You think Margie is deficient in deportment?”

“Oh, no, I should never wish to say that. The poor motherless dear!”

“What is deportment, Miss Girling?”

“La, Mr. Stollard, you know better than I! For shame! The dear child is altogether sweet, yet she cannot but miss a lady-mother’s refining influence, the daily contact with a

gentlewoman born." Miss Girling dropped her eyelids.

"You object to Miss Gray?"

"I object? Really, Mr. Stollard, you make one say such things, I am almost afraid to talk to you. I object? No, indeed. The idea! Miss Gray is a very superior person. Her father was in trade. Her brother is, I believe, a curate in the Church of England. You could not have selected a more estimable nursery-governess."

"But it is I who have educated Margie."

"She has, indeed, had a *teacher* such as few children could dream of. All that she now requires to render her the most charming of girls is a gentlewoman's daily influence, an English lady's constant intercourse, the atmosphere of a cultured English home."

Anthony started up, and held out his hand to Miss Girling.

"Thank you!" he exclaimed. "I am so much obliged to you. She shall have it."

Miss Girling blushed, and coughed.

"You need not be distressed about Miss Gray," she said. "I know that she is only waiting for an opportunity to take a step from which she has long shrunk in vain. She believes it her duty to go and keep house for her brother, and I am sure she is right."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Anthony, overwhelmed by the pressure of fate.

"The brother is a widower, as you are probably aware. He has seven children. And what is home without a mother?"

"In a year he will marry again," said Anthony, bitterly.

"Miss Gray will grudge no one his happiness. She was saying to me only the other day that it was the best thing he, or any other widower, could do. I'm sure I beg your pardon, Mr. Stollard—I—— Gracious, who's there? *Si, si, Cenza, vengo.* These Italian servants never know how to behave. But I

like Italy—at least, for the winter. I quite sympathise with your feeling about Italy.”

“Thank you. Do you know if the post has come in?”

“I will inquire,” said Miss Girling, a little crestfallen.

A few minutes later, pale, little Miss Gray brought up his letters.

“Might I speak to you, sir, for a moment?” she asked, in her timid way, perpetually dreading a liberty she would never have ventured to take. “I have felt, for a long time, that it had become my duty to do so, but the courage was wanting.” She broke down already, with easy tears. “Margaret is twelve years old, as you remarked this morning. Do you not think, Mr. Stollard, it is time some more—efficient companion should take my place?”

“I shall be very sorry to lose you,” answered Anthony, expectantly.

She noted the "shall."

"Is there no other reason for your going?" he added.

"None other but dear Margaret's welfare. I was not speaking of immediate departure. In the first place, I must consider your convenience."

"I had understood from Miss Girling that you were anxious to join your brother Alfred—the poor fellow who lost his wife last year."

"Miss Girling!" cried the governess. "Oh! the—landlady's niece is not acquainted with my private affairs! I have spoken with her, of course, about my poor brother's bereavement, as I have with you, Mr. Stollard. But in all matters I shall be guided by your kind and *generous* advice." Miss Gray cried a little, quietly. "You have always been to me like a—like a father," said poor, little Miss Gray. She hoped for a pension or something, she hardly knew what.

"I must see about it," he said, taking up

his letters as a form of dismissal. He noticed that the top one was from Mrs. Fosby. "Accipio omen," he said to himself. "If she bothers about the child's education, I sha'n't send her. Voilà!" He tore open the letter; it was full of gossip, eager inquiry, affectionate messages—no more.

He carried up to Miss Gray a couple of illustrated papers, unopened. "You and Margie had better make ready to start for England next week," he said. "I may have an early opportunity of sending you. She would go to her grandmother; you could stay with her just at first. I shall remain here."

He returned to his studio. "Good God, what a life!" he said aloud, and locked himself in the inner room, and painted.

CHAPTER X.

IN less than a fortnight Margie started for England, accompanied by Miss Gray, and accompanying Lady Mary. Eveline was also of the party; she had compromised herself quite sufficiently, and was content. When her painter felt convalescent, he would come over to London and marry her. "Without a shilling," said Lady Mary.

"Oh, yes, he quite understands that; he doesn't mind," replied Eveline.

Miss Gray had taken tearful leave of dear Florence, and also of dear Miss Girling and kind Mr. Stollard. In parting she had felt it her sacred, solemn duty, much against her inclination, to say to that kind good blind man : "Beware of Miss Girling," thereby

leaving a vague impression on Anthony's mind that Miss Girling overcharged for extras.

The loneliness which settled upon him after Margie's departure exceeded all that, in his lonely life, he could have imagined possible. Accordingly he reproached himself for selfishness in his intercourse with the child. Yet her presence had not always been a solace; often she had pressed upon him as a suffocating burden, with her unintermittent questionings, her ceaseless "Papa!" Not the sweetest of fathers can endure unmitigated child.

And large parts of his day remained suddenly empty, now that the hours of teaching fell away from it. Never had child been so delightfully instructed as Margie—the story of the world and those who dwell in it had taken shape before her admiring eyes in a slow development of illustrations; and if the picture were not at once forthcoming, the

teacher's clever fingers quickly sketched the scene. By the time the girl was ten years old, she could have explained to you the style of any building she passed in the streets (supposing it had a style); would have stared in still amazement, had you said a Louis XIV cabinet was Louis XV; would have told you stories by the hour, had you desired it, out of Shakespeare, or Herodotus, or the *Morte d'Arthur*; or have shown you engravings, with explanatory comments, of red Peruvians or solemn Hindoos. A cheerful child, that had learnt all this without any trouble of learning, playing through the thorny thickets by her father's side. "To grow up like mamma. To be good some day like mamma," that was Margie Stollard's ideal, "so that papa might love her, as he loved, and still loves mamma."

Her letters now poured in from England, full of varied delight. A hundred home-enjoyments, long discussed with Miss Gray, un-

expectedly lay in her lap. She was taken to Thurdles, and everybody spoilt her; she visited Nurse Lintot, and the old woman rose up and blessed her; Uncle Henry, she wrote, was most kind; Mrs. Fosby she had evidently pleased. Anthony, it must be owned, found these rippling letters rather difficult to swallow; they ran over. With scorn of his own selfishness he checked a grimace. He was glad the child should enjoy herself, even over yonder.

But he painted all the better when the time approached for her return. "Why, he's looking much more cheerful," said good-natured Mrs. Thomson. During the last fortnight he painted desperately, day and night. "One would think he *had* to do it," remarked Miss Girling, who felt about the mysterious chamber as Blue Beard's consort must have felt, though, alas! she was devoid of Mrs. Blue Beard's claims to cross the threshold. Miss Girling found the lodger disappointing. "Of

course, I can quite understand a gentleman painting to amuse himself," said this resident in Florence.

When Margie, returning towards the end of the autumn, fell into her father's arms at the railway station, he believed that the blank in his life had been filled. Mrs. Fosby came with her; the old lady had not seen her son-in-law since his flight from Thurdles, on that summer morning. Both of them were glad to let Margie chatter on, of anything and everything, as long as it was unimportant, as long as they could listen, and ask questions and take an interest, avoiding one another's eyes. Through the self-created ordeal of this meeting, Margie's flow of new experiences now carried them triumphantly.

"Look, Margie, at the della Robbias," said Anthony, as they drove past the Loggia di San Paolo; he did not trouble Mrs. Fosby to look at della Robbias. "Child, aren't you glad to be in Florence again?"

"Oh, yes, beautiful Florence!" said the girl. "But, papa, I was telling you about the rector's daughters who lived close to grand-mamma." He had to listen to England, England, Thurdles, Mrs. Fosby's circle and surroundings, the worship of King Snob. The old lady said but little, except occasionally to correct a misconception. "The 'Duchess,' my dear! People don't say Lady Dorrisford." At that moment she certainly looked reproachfully towards Anthony, who tried hard not to feel ashamed. He trembled to think of all possible shortcomings. He was relieved when, immediately after dinner, she got up and left him alone with the child.

"Papa, there's a thing I want to ask you," began Margie immediately, with nervous rapidity of speech; "I didn't want to write about it. Grandmamma has quantities of things, you know, that belonged to mamma, relics of when she was a baby, and when she

was as old as I am—her first shoes, and her last pinafore, and all the works she made for birthdays, and——”

“Your grandmother!” exclaimed Anthony, amazed.

“Yes”—the girl looked surprised. “She says that I shall have them all some day. I—I don’t mean when she dies—dear granny! And what I wanted to say was, she gave me—this!”

From under her frock the child drew a plain gold locket, with gold monogram and thin gold chain. She pressed the spring. “Grandmamma thinks this is very like,” she said.

Anthony glanced down on a miniature photo of his wife, a simpering, grey thing, with the absurd head-dress of her teens.

“There are any number of portraits at grandmamma’s,” said Margie. “She was so astonished to find I had never seen one of them. But I explained to her, you did not

like portraits. Papa"—Margie's voice grew imploring—"is this *like*?"

"Come with me," he answered. He led the way, and she followed, upstairs to the studio. He struck a match, and, without speaking, went straight to the inner door. Margie's heart throbbed. He motioned her to accompany him. Hurriedly he lighted a great lamp, that blazed overhead. The child stood in the small chamber and looked.

The walls were hung with a smooth grey texture like clouds; the whole room was bare, but for one picture, looming large. The child trembled with emotion. From grey clouds, in strange paleness of colouring, a white figure bent forward, seraphic, yet humanly idealised—a denizen of heaven, but a daughter of earth. All the warmth of the picture centred in the eyes; and these were gazing at Margie. The locket, with the mother's dull effigy, beat on the daughter's breast.

"And that was mamma," said Margie in a

whisper. She stood immovable for many minutes. Anthony watched her. Then they went out of the little room together.

"Mops," said the father, using the pet name he had given her at Thurdles, "we will keep that picture to ourselves, you and I. Nobody else shall ever see it. And now you must go to bed. You are tired."

He found Mrs. Fosby waiting for him in the sitting-room. "Anthony," she said in an agitated voice, "pray be seated; I have something of importance to communicate."

Anthony did as he was told. Important statements should be made without preparation, he thought.

"Your brother Henry, as you are aware, is unwell," said Mrs. Fosby, dropping a stitch.

"No wonder, with his life, and in that climate!" replied Anthony aggressively; he was speculating where all the hideous articles were which Mrs. Fosby had remorselessly manu-

factured in the last few years. The old lady let the attack pass unnoticed. "But Henry was always fussy," added Anthony. "I dare say it's nothing much."

"He is very ill," replied Mrs. Fosby, studying her work, yet dropping more stitches. "He is going to die."

"My God, what do you mean?" exclaimed Anthony thickly.

"He has been very ill for a long time. Much more so than he chose to let anyone know. But his energy and his sense of"—Mrs. Fosby's eyes were fixed on her knitting—"of duty are immense. However, at last he has had to give in. The doctors insist on his leaving England. He is coming to the Riviera."

"To recover?" exclaimed Anthony passionately.

"No—to die."

Anthony sat with his face behind his hands. When at last he looked up, "Henry!"

he said once. At the sound of his voice the tears gathered behind Mrs. Fosby's spectacles. She was vexed with her son-in-law, the strange creature; sorry for him, certainly, but troubled by his eccentric way of taking things. Had *she*, then, not loved her daughter, she who, every Tuesday fortnight, in a room filled with portraits and other mementos, held a meeting of the Dorcas Society Margaret had started as a girl? It was a very nice society; the Hon. Mrs. Boring belonged to it. Well, she, Mrs. Fosby, had taken up the meetings three weeks after Margaret's death.

She now spoke not a word of reproach about Anthony's neglect of his brother—of his brother?—of everything. She had made up her mind, with such vast cause of reproof, to be terribly silent. His sorrow at the bad news greatly touched her, but then, she remembered, he was always demonstrative, not to say sentimental.

“One of my reasons for accompanying

Margie was that I might tell you this," she began presently; "I promised your brother to do so. He is cruelly alone. His servant is coming out with him, François. It is a blessing now that he has a French servant, though I do not approve of foreign domestics myself."

"When is he coming?" asked Anthony.

"In ten days or a fortnight."

"I wonder," said Anthony timidly, "whether—whether he would like us to go to him?"

Mrs. Fosby raised a pair of pleased eyes to her son-in-law's face.

"I know that he desires it above all things," she said. "Anthony, he has of course been compelled to send in his resignation."

"Poor, poor fellow," said Anthony.

"You will see it in the papers in a day or two. What papers have you here?"

"Oh—all," replied Anthony hastily.

"Miss Girling, the landlady's niece, reads the Queen." Mrs. Fosby again looked reproachful. "I think," he continued, "I had better go upstairs to my room. I—your sad tidings have rather disturbed me. Perhaps we had better leave Florence immediately. Good-night. Poor Harry! Good-night."

"Yes, Margie, it is the last glimpse," said Anthony. They were standing under Giotto's tower in the full midday movement of the city. "But perhaps we shall come back, you know."

"No, we shall never come back," answered Margie.

"What do you mean, child?" exclaimed her father uncomfortably. "How can you tell?"

"I don't quite know what I mean, papa. Of course we may come back to Florence. But it won't be coming back to this; not to Miss Girling and Miss Gray, for instance,

though I don't mean that either. I mean I don't know; but things never come back, do they? We shall never be the same again."

"No; for one thing, you will grow older."

She heaved a sigh. "Yes, I suppose one must," she said. And they both laughed.

"And things happen to one, papa, and make one different. My going to England, for instance. I can't be the same as before I went."

"What difference has that made?" he asked, a little anxiously.

"I don't know. I couldn't possibly explain."

"Tell me you are happy, Margie. You have been happy here in Florence, have you not? All I care about is that you should be happy, dear."

"Of course I'm happy with you, papa."

"What would you like? Tell me what you would like. If I can I will get it for you."

All I care about is that you should be happy, dear." His voice was tremulous with passion.

Margie looked straight in front of her. "I don't want anything, thank you, papa," she said, "except for you to love me awfully. Almost as much as you loved mamma."

He stood silent by her side for some time. She was almost afraid she had offended him. At last he said in a very low voice, "You are like your mother in many things. It is time that we went."

CHAPTER XI.

AT the Hôtel des Milords et des Princes, amongst the lemon groves of Mentone, on the stucco terrace with its neat gravel walk and vases of geraniums, its carefully kept borders and yellow-striped aloes, under blue sky and red parasols and smart awnings—the usual laughter and coughing, play, pleasure, and pain! Slow distraction, and sudden death. All just as it had been four years ago; just as it goes on for ever, think we, for whom it goes on till it stops.

Sir Henry Stollard sat on the terrace watching the glitter of the sea. His face was pale, and a trifle parchmenty; his dress was scrupulously trim and proper; his look was proper also, and immeasurably sad.

Anthony sat beside him drawing circles in

the sand. That had been his occupation now for several weeks. The circles were admirably even.

"Isn't it a beautiful day?" said Anthony. "What a season we're having! Such weather as this must do you lots of good."

"Oh, yes, lots," said Sir Henry. "The weather is beautiful. I wish François would bring me those pills."

"He's not due for five minutes yet," said Anthony, consulting his watch. "It takes one at least half an hour to get down to the Pharmacie Centrale and back."

"He is an excellent servant," said Sir Henry; "it would be madness to complain of François."

"Yes, you seem to get on first-rate. It rather amuses me to see you with a French valet, you who are the most English of Englishmen."

"Do I strike you as the most English of Englishmen?" said Sir Henry proudly.

"Well, I suppose we are all of us more complicated creatures than we appear. *You* are very complicated, Anthony."

"Oh, I am cosmopolitan," said Anthony. "I am kaleidoscopic. I am all things to all men."

There was a long pause between them; both watched a shiny skiff upon the shining sea.

"When I die," said Sir Henry—"Don't, Anthony; of course I know I am dying. We *must* talk about it sooner or later; we may as well talk about it now. When I die, what will become of Stawell, and of all my work there, and—and"—his voice faltered—"of everything?" He steadied it. "Let me say what I wanted to say, Anthony—all of it. I have worked hard all my life, you know I have. It's been practical work. I don't know anything about music and painting; I couldn't if I'd tried. We're very different; you take after mother. But there's the cot-

tages, and all the improvements, and the county business. Then there was the parliamentary work, and my Under Secretaryship—I liked that. Anthony, I know you don't care about that sort of thing, but—look here, I'm not yet forty-five, I've hardly had a fair chance—no, I don't want to say that; but I do think, honestly, I do think, sometimes, that I've done some good—in a way?"

"Indeed you have!" exclaimed Anthony. He moved to grip his brother's hand, but refrained.

"I'm glad to hear you say that," answered Henry. "You see, it was my line. I fancy, Anthony, I understand more about you than you think. I don't know about art, but I—I like poetry, some of it. I like Virgil immensely, and Wordsworth. I can understand one's devoting one's life to art. But it's no use bungling. Now any fellow with average brains can do my sort of work, and give his leisure to the other thing."

Anthony blushed, from an indistinct sense of discomfort.

“Anthony,” suddenly Sir Henry turned his eyes from the sea; “I want you, when I am gone, to give your leisure—only your leisure, mind you—to the old place. Smithers has been agent so long, he knows all about it; he’ll help you in everything. I don’t want you to give up painting—no, no. You needn’t go into Parliament, though I wish you would consider it; you’re a Conservative, aren’t you? though you are a cosmopolitan. You don’t want the Radicals to have the old country, do you? But there’s your influence in the county, Anthony, and all the responsibility. You can’t get out of that, you see!”—Sir Henry grew eager. “By not using it, of course you use it wrong.”

“Yes,” said Anthony, dully.

“I’m so glad you see that”—the sick man sank back—“I don’t want you to prom-

ise me anything; only to consider it all, and to do your best."

"I will," said Anthony.

"And God bless you, Anthony. There is François: *ici*, François! I wonder how he can put up with my French accent; now, his broken English is almost pretty! And there are Mrs. Fosby and Margie. Margie, come and kiss your old uncle. You know he may have one kiss a day."

Margie obeyed, seriously, for was she not twelve years old? Between her and Sir Henry a deep friendship had taken root. Margie had never loved so many people before.

"Come, Margie," said her father, "it is high time we went for our walk. Run and get your specimen-box; why didn't you bring it with you?—Fathers always have to do the reproving," he added to Mrs. Fosby as Margie disappeared.

"Especially fathers who educate their own

children," replied the old lady, who disapproved of the system. Anthony mentally shrugged his shoulders as he followed his daughter to the hotel door.

"I have been speaking to Anthony," said Sir Henry. "I have told him everything." Mrs. Fosby did not ask what "everything" was. "That is, everything I could; not so very much, really. There are things one finds it hard and things one finds it impossible to say."

"I think it was enough," he added. He was speaking to himself more than to her.

"And what did he reply?" questioned the old lady, nervously.

Sir Henry recollected himself.

"About marrying again, you mean? True, that was what you had suggested. But I couldn't, I really couldn't, dear Mrs. Fosby. I spoke to him of other concerns—my own, I am afraid. That marriage question, it isn't one I feel I could approach him on; just, see

how he has mourned for his wife—and no wonder.”

“ I have mourned for my daughter,” said Mrs. Fosby, setting her face hard. “ I mourn for her daily; she was all I had. But when we love our departed dead we owe them more than mourning.”

Sir Henry did not answer, but the words struck every chord in his heart.

“ There are social contingencies,” Mrs. Fosby hurried on, “ parental obligations. Anthony has many good qualities, but he is certainly very egotistical.”

“ He says he is all things to all men.” Sir Henry smiled sadly.

“ Well, look what an argument he gave you there!” cried sharp Mrs. Fosby.

“ So he did.” Sir Henry smiled again. “ But, you see, I didn’t like to use arguments. I pity him exceedingly. The whole thing will be a great bore to him, but it can’t be helped.”

"A bore!" exclaimed Mrs. Fosby. She restrained herself. The glories of Stawell rose up before her eyes.

"I daresay it will all come right," Sir Henry sighed, wearily. "Anthony hasn't our abstract idea of duty; perhaps mine is too abstract; with him it is concrete; he will do anything for a person he loves. It is too delicate a matter, Mrs. Fosby; he would ask me why *I* hadn't married, if I cared so much about the name. I had my own reasons, which I shall take down into the grave with me; I have never had fair health; life's been uphill work at the best. I think I had better go in. I am awfully tired."

Meanwhile, Anthony, unaware of this innocent plotting, took his usual walk with Margie. Before his brother broached the subject, he had, of course, realised that a great change was approaching in his life. And now, he had bound himself by a prom-

ise to try and do his duty. Well, he would have attempted that in any case. Since his picture was finished, he had lived idly, in suspense. He could do nothing but wait.

A few days after the above-mentioned conversation, Sir Henry Stollard's illness took its last turn for the worse, and one rainy morning of the mild Riviera winter, the French valet knocked at Anthony's door with the terrified tidings that the sick man had quietly died during the night. "I hope I shall give no trouble," the baronet had repeatedly said. And once he had added, "Baedeker declares the authorities assist one in opposing the hotel-keeper's exorbitant demands." To himself he had often wondered, with many misgivings reminiscent of the last decease in the family, how Anthony would act. Accordingly, he had confided his last wishes, minutely, to François.

"Send me the proprietor," said Anthony,

hastily dressing; "I will settle everything with him."

François hesitated. "You will pardon me, Sar Anzony," he said; "Sir Henry in his last days informed me exactly of whatever he desired."

Anthony winced. "So be it," he said. "You can tell me whatever you wish. I will act accordingly." He had braced himself to all this, and a good deal more. He knew it must come; and he now took up the rôle with a mask, and a mantle, and extra high buskins.

So the little party arrived in England, and Sir Henry was laid to rest in the family vault, with all due ceremonial and decorum. Everybody said he was a very great loss, and people looked askance at his successor.

Anthony was chief mourner, and faced the astonished county—calm, dignified, courteous, exactly as he ought to be! "Not mad a bit, my dear. Not even eccentric. And he

was always a good-looking man!" It was Christmastide, cold, beefy, loud-coloured; the traveller drew his mantle close and fitted his mask.

But he had little time for pose or repose. At Stawell they established him in the library and then began knocking at the door. From morning to night there was "business." For years he had never done any other business than draw cheques. Three weeks after its arrival the picture of Margàret still stood packed.

Margie wandered about the beautiful old house. People were excessively civil to her. A few weeks after she had first realised the possible—far-away—contingency, her father had changed into an English baronet. He was always locked up now with dull-looking people, talking about things that could interest neither her nor him. She was very lonely. She grieved for Uncle Henry, a real friend, just made, just lost. She grieved all the more

that, in dying, he had carried her father with him, out of her empty life.

“Margie, I’ve got a whole afternoon to myself. What shall we do with it?” They were at breakfast together. Sir Anthony looked out on the sunlit frost.

“Sleigh across to Thurdles,” replied Margie at once.

Sir Anthony started. “Why to Thurdles?” he asked. He had not yet been near the place. “And, besides,” he added, hastily, escaping from the subject, “I don’t imagine you would like sleighing at all, even if we could do it; it’s a bitterly cold amusement.”

“Well, papa, you asked me what I liked. There’s a sleigh down at the farm Jackson says will do excellently. And everyone declares that it’s capital fun.”

“So be it. But not to Thurdles.”

“Oh! papa. It would be so nice to go to Thurdles.”

"Why?" He bent forward; the stress of his voice disturbed her.

"Jackson says it's the best road for sleighing," she answered; which was true, as also the fact that, having once visited the old home with her grandmother, she was now anxious to return with him.

"Oh, well, let it be Thurdles," he said, with ill-concealed irritation. He deemed her rather heartless, too much occupied with herself, and the novelty of her English surroundings. This lady of the manor existence must be very bad for a girl of twelve.

She, reconsidering his hesitation to go, resolved to make matters pleasant for him by showing a cheerful front. If there was one lesson that grandmamma Fosby had impressed upon her in their many confidential talks last autumn it was, that she, Margie, must be her father's consolation, the bright element in his clouded life. Papa was—well, to say the truth—morbid; to this Margie de-

murred. "And you must help us to get him out of that, my dear. You mustn't, above all things, encourage him in what I call parade of the afflictions, or, is it the affections? The present belongs to the future; I mean, your father belongs to society. I don't think his liver can be right. Now, Margaret, tell me, frankly, is he looking bilious?"

"What is bilious, grandmamma?"

"Oh!—er, yellow, er—green. Dear me, child, I fear you have been very much neglected. Does your so-called governess never——"

"No, no, grandma; only papa won't allow me to talk about diseases."

"Administer a necessary pill," said grandmamma, severe, over her spectacles.

"Why, that sounds like the hymn, grandmamma," replied Margie, laughing.

"*What* hymn, child?"

"Oh! you know; the funny hymn: 'Now, come down, Sal——'"

"Indeed, I do *not*. Margaret, we had better speak of something else."

But Margie had remembered to be the bright element in her father's life. On this occasion also, as they flew over the crackling snow, she talked and laughed until his face was lit with smiles. The whole landscape swam around them in vast masses of white and blue, under a continuous downpour of diamond sparkles. It was a glorious sun-filled winter day.

"Yes, yes, it is beautiful, but very cold," said Anthony, shivering.

Then it was Margie's turn to shudder, for she suddenly realised that perhaps her father would perish of cold, and she would have killed him! She remembered reading Siberian stories about exposure in snow. *She* didn't feel uncomfortable, but then she was so strong. He wasn't strong, she believed; his complexion was sallow, and they had lived in Italy. She trembled for the dear life, whose

possible risk had never occurred to her in the gentle south.

“Oh, let’s stop and go home,” she said, her eyes filling.

Already they had caught sight of vague gables, among the barren trees.

“Why?” he questioned.

“It’s so cold, papa.”

He set his teeth hard. “Not for this last short bit,” he said, and whipped up the horse. The girl’s callousness seemed incomprehensible; to him the moment was sacred, overwhelming.

He resolutely passed from one room to another, explaining many things, recalling more, reverting to so much he had told her of an hundred times at Florence, re-living with the child and their embalmed memory the suddenly resuscitate past. How often had he not pictured, with dread and yearning, this tenderly solemn hour? For the first time in all these years of carefully cultured recollec-

tion, the dead presence seemed to breathe beside them, to listen as they spoke with bated voices, to look straight into their eyes. And now Margie was preoccupied with the cold, her own health, her own comfort—anxious to hurry on, to get back to tea!

“It is the beefiness of England,” he reflected. That was a favourite expression of his. “The beefiness of England.”

“Yes, that was the corner you were always stood in, when you were naughty,” he said; “the corner from which you said that you would be good, if you could, but you couldn’t ‘because of the old Madam;’ and Nurse Lin-tot was very angry, for she thought you meant grandmamma! Come away, Margie. You are never naughty now!” His voice was just a trifle bitter; he hurried past the one closed door he had come resolved to open, and made for the hall door.

“Please, Sir Anthony,” spoke the caretaker, interrupting him, “the case you sent

home this morning 'as been placed in Mrs.—in my lady's—begging your pardon—hown room, as you hordered, Sir Anthony—and I've laid a screw-driver on the table all ready, as was the message, Sir Anthony."

Margie looked up. With quick insight she understood what the case contained.

"It has got too late for to-day," said Anthony hastily. "Let everything remain as it is, Mrs. Gibbons; I shall be coming back next week." His mind was out of tune with the child's; he wanted to get away.

He turned back on the steps. "Be sure nobody touches it," he said.

"Touch it—or anything, Sir Anthony!—lor, before anybody was to——" The horse flung his head up impatiently, with a jingle of bells.

Father and daughter spoke little on the way home. He was amazed that she had not asked after the boudoir. A water-colour por-

trait by himself—an early thing, poor—hung in his old “den”; she had turned away from it impatiently. The locket and chain were long gone from her neck; she never talked any more about photographs. He wondered whether she was deliberately setting herself to forget, rebelling against his morbid clouding of her bright young existence. She was right. The more fool he!

When he went up to dress for dinner, François desired a word with him. That was only natural; somebody was always standing ready to worry him now. “Well, what is it?” he said hastily.

“Sar Anzony, I ’ave waited till you were—’ow shall I say it?—installed. But now I ’ope zat you will permit me to speak. You ’ave no more, I imagine myself, immediate necessity for my services?” The valet looked interrogative. He was a blue-cheeked, high-boned Parisian, creamy of complexion, closely cropped.

"Well, no, I suppose not," replied Anthony much relieved. "Why? Do you contemplate leaving Stawell?"

"For myself, I would not, Sar Anzony. Sar 'Enry was an excellent master. You also are an excellent gentleman. But zere are reasons which render imperative zat I return to my native land."

"I hope they are pleasant reasons, Francois. Profitable reasons also. I shall always wish you well."

"Ah, Sar Anzony, where is zere anyzing profitable to ze people of my condition? We are born to be poor. England is profitable. But I cannot remain in England. It is physically impossible."

"That I can enter into," returned Anthony heartily. "To foreigners the climate must be terribly trying."

"Ah, Sar Anzony, it is not ze climate, it is ze language. Ze language to me, it would be fatal. In time I say no."

“The language? what on earth are you aiming at?”

“Ze English language, Sar Anzony, in ze foreigner oo ’as ze tendency, it is proved by ze medical auzorities zat it produces cancer in ze zroat. Zink of it, Sar Anzony, it is ’orrible! Ze German doctors—I ’ave read in many newspapers—zey ’ave proved zat ze German Emperor Frederic ’ave died from speaking English in ze bosom of ’is family. ’Im I need ’ardly pity, ’e was a Prussian. Still one pities ’im—cancer in ze zroat; it is too ’orrible! And of late, since I read zat, I ’ave pain in my zroat, many times. I say it cannot be, but in vain. I go. I fly.”

“Cancer in the throat? What unutterable nonsense!”

“It is ze ‘th,’ zey believe, Sar Anzony. See, you ’ave it even in your name. But in vain I avoid it, Sar *Anthony*! I can say it as well as ze English. Better! But I refrain.

Carefully do I avoid it. Yet ze soreness is zare."

"I remember reading about the Emperor's doctors," said Anthony. "But I didn't think any one believed it—not even they!"

"Ah, Sar Anzony, it is impossible for one nation to understand another—especially ze English. And you, who are of all people most English——"

"Dear me!" exclaimed Anthony, amazed. His astonishment overcame his discretion. "You say that, after having lived with my brother?"

"Sar 'Enry never come outside; 'e was white among ze whites, ça ne se voit pas. You, you are white among ze blacks; ça se voit."

"I observe," replied Anthony, greatly interested. "But why don't you say 'black among the whites' at once, while you're about it, for that is what you mean?"

The valet threw up a deprecating hand. "Monsieur plaisante," he said.

"And, by the bye, if you are so afraid of speaking English, why do you persist in using that language to me, while you always spoke French with my poor brother, who couldn't make himself understood?"

"Monsieur ne sera pas fâché?"

"Of course not, as I ask you!"

"Well, then, Sar Anzony, Sar 'Enri, 'e speak so ill, nobody zink to compare, but Sar Anzony 'e speak so well, one observes 'ow it be ill. And to a Frenchman it 'urt. But zat is of no importance; it is only because you ask, zat I explain myself. It is unintentional, Sar Anzony, it is instinctive; I speak, of course, ze language you desire me to speak. But as for me, my country calls me; I am 'omesick. To live 'ere always, in ze English country, it were to me simply impossible. Sir 'Enry was in London, in ze movement; it is 'orribly dark zere, indeed, but ze doctors

declare ze darkness is ealzy! 'Ere I would fall ill of some swifter disease, even were it not for ze fear of ze language. I would take ze liberty of presenting my younger brozer, oo 'as possibly all ze family virtues, and certainly none of 'is elder's particular faults."

"Your faults?" asked Anthony with an amused smile.

"We all 'ave zem."

"And you don't object to the idea of your brother falling ill?"

François looked mightily offended.

"'E 'as not ze tendency, Sar Anzony. Ah, yes, I 'ave certainly my faults. But not egotism; for my family I sacrifice myself. Would you please to see my brozer? After dinner may 'e mount?"

"What, you've got him here!" Anthony turned from arranging his tie.

"But yes; before offering my resignation, was it not my duty to obtain a *remplaçant*?"

“You could have spared yourself the trouble, had you uttered a word. I shall not require a man.”

The valet stared in round-eyed silence.

“Well, what is it?” queried Anthony, provoked.

“But, Sar Anzony, I do not understand. Sar—Anzony—Stollard—Baronette—not—require—a—man!”

Anthony laughed aloud.

“No,” he said, “I shall live a quiet life down here, very different from my brother’s.”

The man made a grimace. “But yes, it will be quiet,” he said.

“And as soon as possible—and as long as possible—I shall go abroad.”

The man pricked up his ears. “Go abroad,” he repeated dubiously.

“Yes; don’t you approve?”

“Sar Anzony, I should not venture to interrogate. But I ’ad been assured zat it was out of ze question, zat ’enceforze you would

inevitably ever remain in zis country, Sar Anzony."

"And who assured you so? Not I."

Again François cast up his hand. "No, Sar Anzony. Nor Mrs. Fosby. But I 'ave understood it is impossible for ze baronette of Stawell to reside on ze Continent, ozerwise——"

"Otherwise you might not have found yourself catching cancer. And who gave you that precious bit of information?"

"Everybody," said the valet doggedly. "Also Jane Mary, Mrs. Fosby's maid."

CHAPTER XII.

"Oh, you will accept the inevitable," said Lady Mary. She threw herself back among the Oriental cushions of her little London smoking den. "People always do."

"Not always," said Anthony moodily.

"Educated people do. It proves want of refinement to go on kicking against the pricks."

Anthony flushed.

"And you say that to me, who have never done anything else?"

Lady Mary laughed between two pulls of her cigarette.

"Oh, yes, you have," she said. "That is only fancy. You were very comfortable in Florence, I feel sure. And now you will make an excellent monarch of Stawell."

"You really think so?"

"And member for South Oaks."

"That never!" he exclaimed, with great energy.

"Yes, yes, you will. It is your duty, and you think it unpleasant—you are certain to do it."

"I have never done my duty yet."

"So be it; the man who says that is about to begin. But you are mistaken. Ever since the loss of your wife four years ago you have devoted yourself to your little daughter for her sake. You have done a great deal more than your duty, though I am not quite sure what your duty was. And now, for the sake of your dead brother, you are going to sacrifice yourself over again." He would have protested, but she stopped him. "And quite right too," she said coolly. "Besides, you cannot act otherwise. There is no greater tyranny on earth than the self-indulgence of your conscientious man. You will force your-

self, my dear Anthony, to accept this vacant seat."

"No, I sha'n't," said Anthony.

"Shall—sha'n't. What a funny sort of schoolboy conversation we are having. Well, if you don't, so much the better for me."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"If you definitely refuse, they will put up my husband, *faute de mieux*. You know he was thrown out at the general election."

"I thought he was to be consoled with a baronetcy?"

"The baronetcy will come in any case; he has paid for it."

"I congratulate you."

"Oh, no. To me it seems an absurdity. An old man like Thomas does that sort of thing for his sons." Over Lady Mary's face stole a meditative look of regret. "But I should prefer him to get back into Parliament; it will occupy his evenings, and restore his good temper, which Eveline's behaviour

has not been calculated to improve. Now, we play piquet every night, and I detest piquet."

"Most certainly Mr. Hunt shall have my seat," said Anthony gleefully.

"'Tarry a little; there is something else.' That's a quotation, isn't it? You haven't even asked after Thomas's political views. But of course you can guess them. Fifty thousand a year and a cheesemonger grandfather. Thomas is, of course, an ultra-Conservative."

"Do you say these sort of things to many people?"

"To you only. Hush, you should never extract that kind of confession from a woman. Take another cigarette. Thomas is opposed to every social reform or improvement. In his speeches of course he calls himself a Tory Democrat. I imagine the Government find him rather a handful. But they *must* give him a seat again, whether for South Oaks or some other place. He will make an excellent successor to Sir Henry."

Anthony sat looking at his boots for some time. Presently he said, with deep conviction—and a laugh—in his voice:

“Lady Mary, you are a very intriguing woman.”

“I have not the remotest idea what you mean,” she replied promptly.

He got up. “It would be difficult,” he said, “to make myself plainer. But how about the piquet?”

“I also,” she replied, playing with her cigarette; “I accept the inevitable—at least, till the next vacancy. Even the Government of this great empire, you see, has to do that.”

He went off to his club, where he had a room. He found Mr. Smithers, the agent, waiting for him, and also the inevitable packet of letters. He glanced over these. One was from Thomas Hunt. The writer, presuming the report to be true that Sir Anthony Stollard was returning to Italy and amateur painting, asked in no very dignified manner for the

seat thus left vacant. His political convictions, he need hardly affirm, were entirely Sir Henry's—Tory Democracy, government for the people. Anthony tossed the letter aside, and turned to the agent. "More business?" he said.

He paused presently, surrounded by papers.

"I don't understand these figures," he said; "I am so stupid at sums, you must really have patience with me, Smithers."

"Excuse me, Sir Anthony"—Mr. Smithers' manner was nervous—"it is quite possible there should be some confusion in the carpenter's account. Jobson is a terrible muddle-head. Will you allow me—you are so quick, Sir Anthony, at noticing things. Sir Henry was nothing to it."

"You say that to flatter me," replied Anthony rather stiffly.

"No, indeed, it is gospel truth. Sir Henry took great pains about everything. But you

are much quicker about things. I—I will look over Jobson's statement again, if you will permit me, Sir Anthony. I had just got it as I was coming away."

"Is there anything more?" asked the baronet.

Mr. Smithers sat bolt upright and twiddled his thumbs.

"There is the election," he said.

"Well, what about it?" asked Sir Anthony impatiently.

"They have put up a Labour candidate in Rusborough."

"Indeed!" Anthony pushed all the documents away and turned round with great interest. "How is that? Tell me all about it. I thought that my brother had never been opposed."

"Nor has he, Sir Anthony, nor would you have been. None of them would have ventured, though for years the people at the new paper-mills have been burning to do it. So

they've seized on the opportunity of your not standing, and before one could say 'Jack Robinson,' the thing's done."

"And who is this Labour candidate?"

"Oh, I don't know. It's some Socialist person from London, in a black coat—a great speaker, I'm told. He used to be a Methodist parson, and now he believes only in damning the rich."

"But who said I was not going to stand?"

Mr. Smithers coughed. "It was generally reported, Sir Anthony. You yourself have repeatedly informed me that you intended shortly to return to the Continent. And the Radicals at Rusborough thought they would stand a much better chance against a London banker, a personage utterly unknown in these parts, so they're out with their man."

"What London banker?"

"Mr. Hunt, Sir Anthony. He is to be the Conservative candidate, is he not? So we have all understood, and, of course, with your

entire approval? His chances are excellent, on the whole: of course he must promise still more than the other man."

"I know nothing of Mr. Hunt's candidature. That is to say, I hear of it to-day for the first time. But no Conservative candidate could promise as much as the other man."

"Why not, Sir Anthony? Lots of 'em do. They will not keep their promises, but then, neither will the Radicals. It is for a candidate to make promises and for his party not to keep them. And I fancy Mr. Hunt is quite aware of that fact."

"How do you know?" asked Anthony quickly.

"I am speaking from hearsay. I have not the pleasure of Mr. Hunt's personal acquaintance." The agent's manner was hurried, his statement only literally correct. He had already corresponded with the great banker, had received money from him, and hoped to receive more.

Anthony remained silent for some time, meditating on all that he had just heard, and combining it with Lady Mary's warning. Then he deliberately crossed his Rubicon.

"I knew nothing of Mr. Hunt's plans," he said. "I intend to stand myself."

Annoyance kept Smithers from answering immediately. At last he said:

"That resolution, if you adhere to it, will cause a great change in all your arrangements, Sir Anthony."

"I had hardly made any definite arrangements as yet."

"I was thinking of the past—of your life at Florence."

"That is over," said Anthony, and he sent the agent away.

Mr. Smithers walked to Paddington in a condition of mind which he himself would have described as "put out." Sir Henry had been an excellent type of the landlord who is also a politician, and under Sir Henry's su-

premacy, the agent had succeeded in gradually stealing his thousands. He had calculated on stealing his ten thousands under the nominal rule of the new man at Florence. "How uncommon sharp was Sir Anthony," he reflected, "about spotting those alterations in Jobson's account." His face grew exceedingly rueful. "And as for that banker's commission, it's gone—and only a contested election remaining, for the first time in my life, with all the extra bother, and not an extra halfpenny—oh lor!" In the train he very nearly wept for Sir Henry.

Meanwhile Anthony, having announced his decision, was anxious to get back to Stowell, before the news should be all over the county. He hurried through his business in London, and without taking leave of Lady Mary, returned hastily home.

Mrs. Fosby had kept Margaret company while the master of the house was away. The old lady enjoyed managing a considerable

establishment; she liked a good quarrel with an upper servant, it braced and invigorated her. To "give people a piece of her mind," when she could insist on their taking it, had always been her favourite act of generosity. It was a wonder, considering what a lot of mind she had left—to do various things nobody desired of her. The household of Stowell, accustomed to an accurate but easy-going bachelor, broke out into sporadic rebellion, and kept "Mother-in-law," as they scornfully called her, in an exquisite flurry of dignity and nerves. The state of affairs did not augur well for Sir Anthony's ultimate repose.

"My dear Margie," said Mrs. Fosby for the twentieth time, "young as you are, you can exercise great influence on your father. He attaches much importance to your likes and dislikes, a great deal more than people did to children's ideas when *I* was young. It is very nice, I daresay, but it is a great

responsibility. Your father's happiness and comfort are largely dependent on you."

Margie's young heart fluttered. When grandmamma talked like that, she always wanted to cry. But she only said bravely: "I will do all I can, grandmamma. At Florence, when it rained, I always made him change his boots."

Mrs. Fosby smiled, with full consciousness of an old lady's wisdom—"Especially now," she continued, "when circumstances are so much altered. Your dear father is now a personage of very great importance"—oh, delicious words! She looked through the windows of the morning room, away across the park—"many men, women, and little children—children like yourself—are dependent upon his decisions. Yes, it is a great responsibility. You like Stawell very much; you enjoy being in this beautiful home, do you not, my dear?"

Mrs. Fosby had decided on ruling An-

thony through his affection for Margie. It was not a very magnanimous resolve, nor was she conscious of having taken it. She represented the matter very differently to herself.

"Yes, I like it very much," replied Margie, who fully appreciated her social importance, "but——"

"But—?" repeated Mrs. Fosby anxiously, and paused in her tatting.

"I should like to live at Thurdles best."

"At Thurdles, my dear!—at Thurdles!" repeated Mrs. Fosby in amazement. "Why, Thurdles is quite a small house in comparison with this! There are no deer there—no conservatories to speak of—no—why, my dear, what could make you give the preference to Thurdles?" Her voice was quite irritable; the contrariness of human nature annoyed her.

A delicate instinct kept Margie from mentioning her reason. "It is such a pretty place,

grandmamma; the name was originally 'The Hurdles,' was it not?"

"I'm sure I don't know," replied Mrs. Fosby, still ruffled.

"Papa told me so," said Margie.

"Now, Margie, you must not allow your father to worry about that place." Mrs. Fosby grew eloquent as visions rose before her of Stawell shut up, the whole establishment disbanded, her own short-lived grandeur a thing of derision.

"You know, Margaret, I have told you before, that your father is—how shall I say?—inclined to be morbid. You must counteract the tendency. I mean, you must do all you can to enliven him. Nothing could be worse for him—nothing—than a residence at Thurdles."

"Yes, grandmamma, I quite understand," said Margie.

"I am glad you do, my dear. And the less you refer to your mother, the better. You

may talk of her to me, dear; I am able to bear it."

"I never mention her now," said Margie, her eyes suffused with tears. "Besides, I hardly ever talk to papa about anything. I very seldom see him to talk to."

"My child, on the whole that is better than the other extreme. A young girl can be too much with grown-up people, especially with men."

"Papa isn't a man," replied Margie indignantly. Mrs. Fosby sighed.

"Perhaps not," she said, "perhaps not. But at any rate you are far better off with out-and-out women, like me."

"I like to be with you," said Margie. Mrs. Fosby bent forward and kissed the grandchild she loved better than anything on earth. "I do trust," she said, "that some arrangement will be made which keeps both of you in England. I have a perfect horror of foreign parts and their fevers. In the whole

of Italy, I am told, there are no drains, and I can readily believe it. Ah me! all the sanitary improvements in this house have been carried out by Messrs. Jennings, of London." Mrs. Fosby sighed.

"Papa says," remarked Margie, "that the people who live in the healthiest houses are always the first to catch typhoid."

Mrs. Fosby opened her eyes. Neither the doctrine that "extremes meet" nor its practical manifestations had any part in her simple philosophy. "My dear," she said majestically, "your father likes teasing. I hope that when the new governess is found, she will be a good common-sense person, with plenty of accomplishments. Common-sense and refinement, that is what we need. But I cannot bear to think of your going off to Florence together; you are such a small family, Margaret, your father and you."

"I don't see how we could well be larger," protested Margie laughing.

Mrs. Fosby did, though of course she said nothing. She thought it was an exceedingly generous thing in her to desire her son-in-law's re-marriage, but she was also perfectly convinced that her generosity would never be called upon to prove itself sincere.

"If you please, ma'am, could I speak to you for a minute?" said Jane Mary at the door. Her manner betokened agitation.

"What is it? Is it a secret? Come in," replied Mrs. Fosby, attempting to hide her curiosity.

"A secret!—lor, no, ma'am—(I do believe she's afraider than ever of my getting married)—there's been a telegram for the dog-cart to meet Sir Anthony at the station."

Margie clapped her hands. Mrs. Fosby said: "Indeed!"

"But it's the reason of his coming back so sudden, ma'am! 'Tis all over the place ma'am. Sir Anthony is a-going to seat himself in Parliament!"

“God bless my heart!” cried Mrs. Fosby. She half rose, staggering, in her chair. “What do you know of such matters, Jane Mary?” she added testily; “you’re only a stupid country girl!”

“Aged thirty-seven,” said Jane Mary coolly. “I’m not as stupid, Mrs. Fosby, as I was when I took your place, ma’am. And if I knowed the news afore you knowed it, that’s more Sir Anthony’s fault than mine, ma’am!”

“Don’t be impertinent,” replied Mrs. Fosby imperiously. The mistress who says that twice to a maid, and she had said it many times, is lost. Before Jane Mary could answer, as she always did, Sir Anthony himself walked into the room. Margaret flew to him. “Oh, Anthony, is it true?” exclaimed Mrs. Fosby, her voice shrill with agitation.

He did not enquire what. “Oh, yes, true enough,” he replied.

“God be praised,” said Mrs. Fosby.

Her son-in-law looked surprised. “In-

deed?" he answered. "Well, be it so. One has to be thankful for everything, I suppose—even for positive disagreeables and possible mistakes." He walked to the window and looked out on the park, the deer, the bleak, black misery. Suddenly he turned to Margie:

"You foresaw we should never go back," he said.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE fight of Sir Anthony Stollard's election has long remained famous in the annals of Oakshire. Competition was a new thing, but the Radical candidate and his mill-hands made an unexpected display. Unanswerable figures were grouped, and stories invented to prove the depravity of all landlords, and especially of this one. Everybody listened to these "arguments," many believed them: most voted for the lord of the soil.

Some part of his ultimate success was due to the man himself. His manner was modest and sincere: once the nervousness surmounted, he spoke well. Some of his most influential supporters were annoyed, they had hoped for considerable largesse from the London banker; they had to confess, in the end,

that Sir Anthony had a right to his seat. It was all very new and strange, and exciting. Margie would have liked to understand more about it; she dimly realised the enormous gulf between all this vulgar turmoil and the twilight churches of Florence, the Madonnas, the sunset walks to San Miniato.

A new governess was provided, "a very superior and highly accomplished gentlewoman, who has given the greatest satisfaction to her former employer, Mrs. Griene—the Honourable Mrs. Griene, you know—the Espinard family——" So spoke Mrs. Fosby, to whom Anthony had wisely conceded the initiative. All stereotyped subjects were within Miss Bursley's range. She said her interesting young pupil had been terribly neglected. At twelve Gretna Griene had done algebra and dynamics.

The day before his definite departure to claim the seat he had honestly conquered (for he had made no promises beyond those he

would be able to keep), Anthony Stollard rode across, late in the evening, to Thurdles, alone. He shuddered as he walked, with his candle, through the long-deserted house. In the boudoir he found his wife's picture awaiting him; it had waited there in its case for weeks. He set to work by the dim candle-light unscrewing the lid: he took the portrait out uninjured and gazed at it thoughtfully. Then he hung it up in the place he had always reserved for it while painting at Florence, and having adjusted it, he varnished it with great care. The night was far advanced by the time he had finished. Again he sat down and seemed sunk in contemplation of the portrait. Was it a portrait? He smiled gravely. His memories were of that other night—four years ago—in this same chamber: except for the brief hour with Margie, he had never since been near the place. He could not have come with Margie now, whose first curiosity was satisfied, whose memory of her mother was

mildly asleep, as a child's should be. With him also sorrow had become a deep and calm regret. Then the dull winter morning crept between the shutters; he threw them open wide, left them wide open, that in the whole black house this room at least might have such warmth and brightness as were possible, and then, turning his back upon it all, went out with the key in his pocket.

And the London papers discussed his appearance at St. Stephen's. Sir Anthony Stollard had become a public man. They got a lot of information about his private life from his new French valet, François' brother, who had been in his service a few weeks.

When he went to see Lady Mary Hunt, he expected that she would worry him about his acceptance of his fate. But she was too wise a woman, in her generation. Only, in the course of their conversation, she said that she liked a game of cards: he had complained

of the dull evenings at Stawell. "Why don't you play piquet?" she asked, laughing. "Nobody need ever be dull who can play piquet. But now, you will have no time for dulness. We shall see a great deal of you in London." And, indeed, he frequently went to her: he found her immensely useful, with her large experience of society, and she liked to show off her strength. Of course he now spent much of his time in London. Mrs. Fosby had returned, with mutual good-will, to her home on the farther side of Rusborough: during the summer months, and the shooting, whether there were guests to entertain or not, she could take her place, if she chose, as a sort of deputy mistress of Stawell. The absence of solid foundation to her claims made them all the more vexatious; there was irritation in the big house, and discomfort. Sir Anthony, tormented by a wasp's nest of worries, pretended not to notice. He was occupied with the unwilling discovery that his agent, the

faithful Smithers, cheated him. He was hard at work, also, in Parliament, doggedly studying blue books in an honest endeavour to feel less of a fool.

For the greater part of the summer, however, the whole of the season, Margie and Miss Bursley shared the mansion between them—that is to say, of course, they lived in a couple of rooms. Miss Bursley's system of education was very different from Miss Gray's, or Sir Anthony's. You had to do everything exactly as she wished you to (Miss Gray had ceaselessly commanded, but never enforced), and you had to learn everything exactly as she had learnt it herself. Regular school hours filled the whole day with symmetrical boredom: history was figures (not pictures); arithmetic was letters, botany was Latin, "science" was Greek. Miss Bursley considered herself especially strong on science, in which word she included all those facts about nature that nobody wants to

know. Into Margie's colour-filled world there entered the letter π .

Between capacity for learning and ability for teaching there exists, of course, no inevitable connection. Miss Bursley had picked all the apples off the tree of learning, but she set them as dried and uncooked pippins before her pupil, in a row. The pupil was a proud child, and only cried in private.

England, and especially the English country, however, brought her many compensations. Amongst these riding was chief. She had a pony at Stawell, Puck; he was her only confidant, and, besides one or two of the servants, her only friend. The manes of ponies are designed to wipe children's tears.

And Puck's tiny hoofs soon learnt that one of their chief objects in life must be to gallop across country to Thurdles. The coachman who accompanied his young mistress, though limiting gallops, had no objection to this particular route. The care-taker at the

smaller house was his sister: he liked to go and complain to her of the other servants at Stawell.

While the two sat, amicably irritable, over their teacups, Margie would roam about the house, dreaming dreams. One room was locked; but, in contrast to the others, its blinds and shutters were completely drawn back: by climbing on to a balustrade outside the bay window, she could obtain various views of the inside: by pressing hard against a stone pillar, she could see the picture—the Florentine picture, in full. Often she would sit thus, huddled against that pillar, for a long time: she hardly knew why. She liked it. She liked imagining all sorts of impossible memories. The beauty of the picture awed and delighted her. She had hidden away her grandmother's locket with the pitiful photograph. Once, suddenly, her father had asked her why she never wore it. "I don't like it," she had answered; and then, as a frightened

after-thought, lest she should distress him:

“It isn’t a very pretty locket, is it, papa?”

He brought her an expensive one from London, in his scornful kindness. And he talked, when he came down for Sunday, of the horses and dogs, and the farm.

For himself, he was happy and occupied, pleased with his patent success. Such a number of new interests and occupations crowded around him, he could not but fill up his time. Once or twice he had down a lot of people: it was a bore, but it had to be done. He rather liked it. Lady Mary came for a few days, with her husband. Mr. Hunt was very tottery, made of millions: it was amusing to watch the passages of arms between Lady Mary and the *quasi* mistress of the mansion. But there must always be a great deal of bother, especially for a man, in the managing—well, no, let us say in the supporting—a big household like Stawell. The upper servants agreed with Sir Anthony. They couldn’t understand what

he wanted with Mrs. Fosby at all. A terrible young footman penetrated into his presence, and proved that his brother's most estimable housekeeper deducted one-tenth from the wages, all round: he got a new housekeeper, and had everything paid by the agent. The agent deducted one-eighth. And Anthony thought of old Lord Fowey's favourite story: "What? Discharge my steward? And let a second pauper steal himself as rich!"

It was tiresome to come home to this sort of worries, but it was not altogether disagreeable. The pleasantest and simplest of human beings likes to be more than he was. And there is something not altogether unsatisfactory in the thought of worries awaiting you at Stawell. Besides, Anthony was an eager philanthropist, a believer in, and originator of, various private and political reforms. A position of importance inevitably takes possession of him who acquired it. It is a beautiful thing to paint human saints, but it is a far more

beautiful thing to feel a bit of a saint yourself. Quite honestly, energetically, doing his best, doing good, Anthony had taken the gilded cross upon his shoulders: if honestly, harmoniously, it shifted round to his breast, so much the better for him.

On a Friday afternoon in November—it was the seventeenth of the month, at that moment of decline when a dull day grows soothingly duller—Sir Anthony Stollard arrived at the little Thurdles station. The dogcart, summoned by telegram, was in waiting. Sir Anthony had been expected to-morrow, if at all. He had not come down for the last two or three weeks.

He started at a good pace along the high road, as usual—nervous men like rapid driving—but presently he swung off to the left, with a swift impatience which doubled up the young groom on the back seat. The latter, a new servant from beyond Rusborough, stared

in astonishment at the wrong road lengthening under him. Not going home! Such a thing had never happened before!

No; it had never happened before. Many weeks had elapsed since Anthony had last been near the old house at Thurdles. When down at Stawell, he preferred to drive in the opposite direction, especially with strangers. He could not have endured the idea of anything being altered about the place—there was nothing altered about its associations—but he shrank from the thought of its unchanging existence as he had shrunk away yonder in Florence.

The seventeenth of November!—it was his wife's birthday. In his London chambers, with the yellow fog all around him, he had suddenly resolved not to wait till to-morrow, to go down into the country at once, with an earlier train, to drive first to Thurdles. He had telegraphed, at the last moment, to be met at the little side-station. He now drove

along the short curve of dreary road in the fall of the autumn day.

There was a grey vapour in the air, half mist, half drizzle; it clung about the gaunt, black trees. The avenue of Thurdles looked forlorn and dripping. He shuddered, with a slight irritation, as he drew up at the back entrance, half wondering why he came.

But he passed down the long passage with a heart full of sweetness and tenderness. Linger- ing on the threshold, he gently unlocked the boudoir-door.

In the heavy twilight outside, in the shadow of the pillar, Margie shrank back, with a gasp of amazement, her heart in her mouth! For the immovable door of the boudoir had moved, and her father had come into the room!

Her father! She knew he avoided the place; she reckoned on his tacit dislike of it. Once, under protest, he had come there for her sake. The last thing she would have

imagined possible was his appearing at this moment, when she believed him to be in London.

She, herself, had not come often, especially of late, but to-day the anniversary had attracted her. The day was very dull at Stawell, the atmosphere very unsympathetic. After her drawing-lesson; while Miss Bursley was chatting with the master from Rusborough, Margie had slipped away, saddled her pony unnoticed, and torn across country, in the early twilight, to her window, driven on by an unreasoning impulse—just a glimpse of the picture, and back!

She could not have defined her attitude towards the portrait, or the fascination it exercised over her. Nor could she, now grown old enough to consider such matters, have explained why the tender memory of earlier years had more recently become, under these changes of circumstance, a yearning which, at periods, was almost a pain. Though a fanciful,

she was not a sentimental child. But sometimes she could not help realising that the exchange from Italy to England, while drawing her father away from her, had brought the absence of her mother too cruelly near.

She hung against the casement in terror, crouching back under the shadow of the wall. She dared not move lest he should notice her. She could trust to the black corner to hide her, in the thickening twilight, if only she made herself small enough, pressing close to the pillar, keeping strenuously still. He would go soon, she hoped. He was looking at the picture. He could not stay long in that room.

When she cautiously peeped out, she could see him standing there immovable, with his head uplifted. She shrank back again. The wall, like the air, was very damp and clammy. He must not find her there. She had learnt, with too docile affection, Mrs. Fosby's lesson of unselfishness. She must get

away before he saw her. Still he stood, in the gathering dusk, immovable. She could vaguely trace the outlines of his figure, of the portrait looking down upon the face she could not see.

Suddenly she understood that she must act at once. She must get home before her father. To move along the balustrade was more than she dared venture. She felt with her feet for a resting-place below the pillar; in doing so she slipped, caught herself, and hung, panting, by her fingers, pressed hard on the pillar-foot.

In that position she could not remain more than a moment. She clenched her teeth hard, afraid that the pain at her finger-tips would cause her to cry out. She was still more afraid that, if she dropped, the thud of her fall would betray her. There was no time to reflect. In another second, with the blood spurting from the pressure, she let go.

Her right knee struck against some pro-

jecting stonework as she fell. The distance from the ground was not much, but it was enough to do mischief. She limped away as well as she could to a shrubbery, where her pony awaited her. She untied him, and hurried across the wet grass in her haste to be gone.

But before she had ridden far, she found that her injured knee could not endure the pain of its position in the saddle. She was compelled to slacken her pace, and the dread increased upon her of her father's pursuing dogcart wheels.

She struck off into a lane as soon as she could, and gasped with momentary relief. But the road she must now follow would take her a longer round. She struggled to bear the pain as she rode, in constantly alternating spells, her pony fretting under the unwonted checks, and cruelly increasing her sufferings by perpetual jumps and bumps. She set her face, white and miserable, resolved not to cry.

The drizzle, which had long hesitated, settled into rain. More and more she was compelled to walk her pony. She was still a long distance from home.

When Anthony reached Stawell, he went straight, as was his custom, to the school-room. Miss Bursley sat there, still in animated contest with the drawing-master.

"Sir Anthony, you will judge between us," said the governess, who had none of those considerations which she collectively dubbed "nervousness." "Mr. Pimberly is trying to convince me—nobody ever convinces me—that the stupider a mother is, the better for her child."

"I did not say that," protested poor, timid, self-assertive, little Mr. Pimberly. "Few women, I said, are capable"—he bowed—"of combining study with physical care."

"And we governesses, pray?" cried Miss Bursley.

The drawing-master grew red. "There are exceptions," he faltered, "which prove——"

"Sir Anthony, I trust I am an exception!" persisted Miss Bursley.

"Margie would bear witness to that," replied Anthony, smiling. "By the bye, where is she? She was not at the door."

"I knew nothing of your coming," replied Miss Bursley, aggrieved. "The *servants* (she meant the housekeeper) tell us nothing. Margie has gone to wash her hands for tea. I will send for her."

But in a minute or two the chambermaid came back with the news that Margie was nowhere to be found. Her pony was missing. A stable-boy said she had gone out for a ride.

"Gone out for a ride!" exclaimed Anthony, immediately distressed. "At this time of day! In this weather! Where to?" He turned on Miss Bursley.

"I am sure I have no idea!" cried Miss Bursley in an agitated voice. "She is very self-willed, Sir Anthony. It is very difficult to control all her movements. I had given her a task to prepare before tea!"

"The child must be found," said Anthony. He reflected for a moment. "Better not make a fuss. She will be back before tea, I dare say. We can always wait till then."

"Unless I could be of any use, perhaps I had better be going, Sir Anthony," said the uncomfortable drawing-master.

"Oh certainly. Good night," said Sir Anthony. He stood for a moment looking at Miss Bursley curiously, as if he would like to say something. But he restrained himself, and, in silence, walked out of the room and downstairs.

In the lighted entrance hall he met Margie, lame, dripping, bedraggled—utterly worn out.

“Child, where have you been?”

She did not answer, only looked at him piteously.

“Where have you been? Margie, I am very angry with you!”

The tears she had kept back sprang to her eyes.

“What absurd pranks are these! I cannot understand Miss Bursley. I insist upon knowing where you have been!”

She swayed forward, and he ran towards her, just in time to catch her in his arms.

“Why, bless you, Sir Anthony, she’s only fainted,” said the housekeeper. “She’ll be all right again in a minute or two.”

And so she was, though her knee took a fortnight to heal. She told that she had ridden off for the sake of the ride. She said nothing of Thurdles. “Your father is morbid, my child,” had said Mrs. Fosby. “Above all things, you must never encourage his morbidity! And keep your own counsel—except

when you come to me—it's the best thing for a widower's child! ”

And so it came about that Margaret Stollard was sent to boarding-school.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE school of Mrs. Fosby's selecting was inevitably ultra-select. In fact, it had reached that stage of selectness in which a teacher confers a favour by admitting a pupil. The number of Margie's companions never exceeded ten: and the money expended on these young ladies' education would have sufficed to bring up half-a-dozen of their equals with ease. Still, whatever ignorance or ineptitude you may ultimately return to, there is always a satisfaction in remembering that large sums have been wasted on making you what you are. And modern education, whether cheap or expensive—it is only cheap when other people pay for it—has always for finale, the apparently unalterable puzzle, how it should have been possible to teach anyone such a

quantity of subjects and leave him knowing so little in the end.

With Margie, however, the result was of no importance. Mrs. Fosby's secret opinion remained, although she herself was unaware of it, that the less a woman knew, beyond certain accomplishments, the better for everybody; her own collection of inaccuracies, misconceptions and mistakes, historical, geographical, ethnographical, was curiously complete. Her granddaughter, who could distinguish between Guiana and Guinea, between Socrates and Solon, had always seemed to her over-educated, as a child. Two nieces of Lord Fowey were among the pupils at Miss Grough's. The arrangement was in every way a desirable one. Anthony approved of the beautiful house and grounds. He had no doubt his little daughter would be happier among these pleasant surroundings and companions. Her reticence and carelessness disturbed him. She was a strange child, not as

docile and affectionate as he had hoped. Doubtless Lady Mary, who warmly approved of the school-plan, was right: children need a congenial "milieu"; girls especially must grow up in a circle of similar acquaintances, planted like apple-trees in an orchard, each in the same little paling of proprieties, rooted in prejudice, painted white with pretence.

When Margie had been away for a few weeks in her new home, Mrs. Fosby astonished everybody by quietly abandoning the neighbourhood of Rusborough, and taking a house within two miles of the school. Nothing could be more disconcerting. Had not the object of Mrs. Fosby's existence been the achievement of "county" rank? Had not she almost succeeded in making people think and speak of her only as the mother-in-law of Sir Anthony Stollard, the mistress, to all practical purposes, of Stawell? And now, in the moment of her triumph, she resigned all this glory, and went to live where she was no-

body, where socially she must begin all over again. Love achieves all things. Not only can it turn beads into diamonds, but it can leave them, while giving them the beauty of diamonds, beads.

So Margie went to spend her Sundays with her grandmother. The friendship of the two grew closer: the old lady liked nothing better than to tell of days when another Margaret's presence filled her life, and Margie, alone and feeling lonely, clung to these reminiscences with a too romantic interest. On great occasions, as soon as a longer holiday left her free, the child was allowed to join her father, and delightful beyond words were these sunlit vacations, at Stawell, or on the French sea-side, or among Swiss and Italian lakes. Busy as Anthony's life now was, with the constant inevitable activity of a man before the public, these periods of rest he devoted entirely to his daughter, and sometimes it almost seemed as if the Florentine existence

revived. But it was not so, and they knew it. Sir Anthony was a rising politician, fantastic, many thoughts, and not always sufficiently matter-of-fact, but a man of heart and brain ; and Margie was growing into a woman, a serious young creature, overweighted with loyalty to early traditions and responsibility towards her father and herself. They could neither of them be young again, nor sad with the old affectionate sadness. Life had grown much more real, much more raw. But they clung to each other all the more tenderly, too anxiously dissembling that constant solicitude for the other's happiness which was the mainspring of every important action. And they misunderstood each other, or, rather, Anthony misunderstood.

He returned to London after one of these holidays, a delightful three weeks at Beuzeval, and on an early occasion went to visit Lady Mary Hunt. He had heard that her husband was failing, and she calmly admitted the fact.

"I have been a good wife to him," she said, "I feel confident of that. I read him the Economist, of evenings: it is not at all amusing, and anyone with half a head can see what rubbish it all is, besides. If the world were half honest, my dear Anthony, banking would simply be an impossible trade. Fortunately for us, the world isn't honest. Try some of these grapes. They're exceedingly good."

"But he isn't——" began Anthony.

"Oh, yes, he is. He's had things of late would try any man. That terrible business of his daughter, and his dropping out of Parliament, and missing the baronetcy. Although I tell him that, if he will only live another year, I shall get him the baronetcy."

"If he will only live another year——?"

"Yes. Dear me, Anthony, I cannot understand the newspapers! You always seem to me the most literal person I know. Of

course I put it more prettily. I should have liked Thomas to have his epitaph exactly as he wants it. Don't think me unfeeling. *I* can't help it. He's an old man, getting on for eighty. Don't look at me in that way, Anthony. I can't bear it from you!" She stopped speaking: her lips trembled: she plucked nervously at the naked grape-stalk she held in her hand.

"There is one thing I can never understand," ventured Anthony suddenly. "Why did you not want him to get in for Rusborough?"

"How long ago is it since you lost your wife?" she answered.

"Eight years," he replied, taken aback.

"As long as that? Then Margaret is now sixteen?"

"Yes. Next year she will be leaving school and coming home. I want to give her a finishing governess—a sort of companion, to polish her up. She is a dear girl, but I

think she wants a little polishing." He sighed.

"How serious you look," she said laughing. "The polish will come."

"It's not that," he replied hastily, "but I am anxious about her. A marriageable daughter at home! It is a great responsibility."

"You may well say that in this house," she answered gravely; then, seeing the subject was distasteful to him, she led away from it. "And what does Mrs. Fosby say to losing Margaret?" she asked.

"Haven't you heard?" He looked up astonished from moody contemplation of his boots. "My mother-in-law has had a stroke—two, I fear. She is half childish, and quite inarticulate. There are days that she thinks Margie is her maid."

"Dear me," said Lady Mary musingly. "Dear me—how old old people grow." She looked out of window at the rusty trees in

the square. "When you married," she said presently, "your wife was barely twenty. She was one year younger than I."

"Yes," he answered, "I know." He was surprised to find he did not more resent these references to his wife. Lady Mary's voice was gentle; he was sorry for her.

"Is there anything of interest doing in the House?" she said.

"The House is always interesting," he replied, "or never. It all depends upon one's attitude towards the game we play there."

"I think it is always interesting."

"And Margie, never." He laughed.

"Margie is a child. I can understand that during her Easter holidays she wanted to talk of other things than politics."

"Yes, of course. Still, I know girls who do care about what happens, in a general way."

"You have brought up Margie very differently—to take an interest in art."

"That was many years ago. Do you know, I don't think she takes an interest in art."

"Well, what then?" said Lady Mary, indolently eating more grapes.

"When I ask her, she answers little. She is most painstaking, and a little punctilious. She always seems pre-occupied about doing her duty. She wants to be good and affectionate, and make people love her. Well, she succeeds. But sometimes I fear the school is too proper—too religious!"

"Anthony! For shame!"

"You mustn't misunderstand me. You mustn't pretend to misunderstand me. Margie is a dear child. I love her more than anything on earth. I would do anything for her happiness. Anything and everything she cared to ask."

"No wonder she is afraid to speak." His exaggeration nettled her. "Would you give up your career in Parliament, if

she said she preferred to return to Florence?"

"She would never want me to do what she didn't think right. As for the career in Parliament, you know why I took it up?"

"Dear me, no?" said Lady Mary innocently.

"Yes, you do, Mary"—she started ever so slightly—"of course I had to, and all that sort of thing. Well, I don't object; it might have turned out ever so much worse. And if poor Henry knows, he's satisfied. But, as for Florence——" he paused.

She waited, saying nothing.

"Pooh!" he exclaimed scornfully, in quite a different tone, "what right should I have had to go back to Florence? If I had been a real painter—if—if——" Again he halted, then, quite gently, "But I should certainly do everything I could to make Margie happy," he said. He took his hat, and got up to go.

Lady Mary walked with him to the door;

there she shook hands. "Anthony," she said, "there are men whose entire lives are ruined by bad women, and men whose entire lives are ruined by good. You are not of the bad women sort. Good-bye."

As he meditatively descended the stairs, she bent over the banisters: "Come and see me again," she said.

CHAPTER XV.

A FEW weeks later he received, at Stawell, the tidings of Mr. Hunt's decease. He wrote Lady Mary a curt letter of condolence; he was awkward about it, but then, he detested letter writing. For only answer he got the following: "You can't write letters. You had much better have come."

So, understanding her to be annoyed, he went up to London to see her. She looked handsome in her mourning; the black toned down her rather florid style. She was very self-possessed and natural. "He thanked me, before he died," she said; "I liked that."

"And what are you going to do now?" he asked presently.

"Get through my period of retirement as best I can. I don't pretend to like that, and

I certainly sha'n't prolong it. Thomas was very considerate—always. Do you know, he actually as good as asked my pardon for dying in the season. I—I couldn't help crying a little at his saying that, but I told him I—I hoped he would live till it was over. He very nearly did."

"You are going down to Princingham?"

Princingham was Mr. Hunt's ancestral castle.

"How inquisitive you are! As if you cared! No, of all things in the world, not Princingham. Not seclusion in the country! A solitary black figure among the fields and cows! That needs an elegiac state of mind. I shall go to one of the quiet Normandy sea places, not *too* far from a noisier one! 'Et puis, on verra!'"

"Quite so," he answered. He was thinking of his own mourning, sixteen years ago.

"What do you mean?" She flared up a little; his tone displeased her. "I don't make

believe. Of all things I hate pretence; and pose, which is half pretence. The Duchess of Birmingham came in crying yesterday—the dowager, you know, my aunt—very loud and fussy, as usual. ‘Oh, my poor dear Mary,’ she shouted, ‘I *am* so grieved!’ ‘I’m not,’ I said. I couldn’t help myself. C’était plus fort que moi.”

“*That* was pretence,” replied Anthony; “you didn’t mean it.”

“Anthony, how clever you are! Well, no, I didn’t, quite. Do you know, I suppose I had better call you ‘Sir Anthony’ now?”

He got up to go, feeling very uncomfortable.

“Thomas has been so good to me,” she said, “to the last. I suppose you’ve heard?”

“No, I have heard nothing. What are you alluding to?”

“He has left me all his money.”

“And his daughter?”

“Not one penny. He never forgave her,

never spoke of her or wrote to her. He was a vain man, and she had wounded, almost murdered, his vanity."

"Well," said Anthony reflectively, "good-bye."

He went down to Bournemouth, before returning, and took Margie for a walk in the pine woods. "At Christmas you will be coming home for good," he said; "what a change that will make!"

"A very great change," said Margaret gravely. He glanced askance at the grown-up daughter beside him. She was not tall, delicately featured, rather insignificant, he feared. But she had thoughtful, kindly brown eyes, and a face that good men looked at again.

"You like the prospect, surely?" he said, with a tinge of irritation. Perhaps that frightened her, she was always too afraid of hurting him.

“ Oh, yes, yes,” she answered hastily, “ but I was thinking of—the responsibility. I only hope, father, that I shall not disappoint you. You see, I shall have nobody to tell me what to do.” Her voice was even graver.

“ What do you mean?” he said—to lead her on, for he knew.

“ Other girls have their mothers, you see. Lucy and Ermyntrode Dellys, for instance; they are leaving school with me. And when they speak of their plans, it’s ‘ mother this,’ and ‘ mother that,’ all the time.”

“ H’m! Mrs. Dellys doesn’t strike me as a particularly desirable parent. She’s about the most foolish woman I know.”

“ Perhaps,” said Margaret, “ a foolish mother is better than none.”

“ Do you really think so?” He stopped in the darkness of the firwood, and looked at her, astonished. It was as if a revelation had suddenly been accorded him.

“ I do not know, father,” replied Margaret

wearily. "I am speaking of things I know nothing about. Only I could not help thinking what a help it must be. When Lucy doesn't know what to do about anything, she says, 'I'll ask mother,' and goes to sleep."

"Don't you go to sleep?"

"Oh, yes. But sometimes I lie awake, looking for my answer."

"Well, I daresay when you find it, it's a better one than Mrs. Dellys's."

"I don't know," Margie sighed. "One never does know about one's own answer. Very often, for instance, grandmamma didn't agree with me."

Anthony made a wry face. "I should think not," he said, sitting down on a bank.

Margaret huddled up against him.

"I miss her dreadfully," she said, and, to his astonishment, she burst into tears.

He let her cry on quietly—he was not one of the men who can't stand a woman's crying—and very soon she calmed down again.

"When I go to her now," she said, drying her eyes, "she usually thinks I am mother. She talks to me about myself, father, and says she hopes you will bring me up well." Margie gave a little amused laugh.

"I hope you say you have confidence in me."

Margie threw both arms round her father's neck. "She asks me if I love you," she answered; "sometimes as much as half-a-dozen times in one visit. And I never get tired of answering 'yes.'"

The commencement of the midsummer holidays, a fortnight later, brought Margaret down to Stawell, with some girl friends and their mammas, amongst whom were the Dellys. The house filled with guests, there would be no going abroad this summer, for Anthony was hard at work on his Report of the Cottage Industries he had fostered around Rusborough, a little book that he, and, still

more, his friends, particularly desired to see appear before Christmas. At the end of the year, it was expected, an under-secretaryship would fall vacant, and the heads of the Government opined that the post would just suit Sir Anthony Stollard. Sir Anthony Stollard himself never thought he could do anything until he had done it.

His natural attitude towards guests was hospitably to invite them, and to wish they were gone when they came. Some domestic misfortune invariably befell when the house was full of people. The cook was taken ill, or the butler had an attack of the gout. True, Mrs. Fosby could no longer bully the servants, but the servants, or the housekeeper, still bullied Sir Anthony.

One broiling August day, he dropped the pen from his hot fingers, and ran out of his room. The whole house was deserted. Margie had organised a picnic to Grievely Castle, *the* sight of the neighbourhood, a picturesque

ruin. Sir Anthony strolled down to a small lake in his grounds, where a bathing-place had been arranged behind a tall yew-hedge, on which hung a notice with "Occupied," which ladies might turn if they chose. No one had turned it this afternoon, and Sir Anthony was close upon the little bathing-house, when he heard a loud voice say, very decidedly—

"Yes, Margaret Stollard is a good child, but she certainly doesn't know how to behave."

He remained rooted to the spot, afraid to move, lest the speaker should hear him. For the voice was a woman's, Mrs. Dellys's.

"She showed plainly enough that she only wanted Ermy to go this afternoon, and not you, Lucy. Well, she can't help it, poor thing, she wants some one to help her. Her father, I suppose, would call her sincere."

Anthony devoutly hoped they would jump in, and enable him to escape.

"Margie isn't the fit person, of course, to

play mistress of a house like this," continued Mrs. Dellys querulously, her voice half muffled.

"Why doesn't Sir Anthony marry again?" said the girl's voice.

"Do I know? Does any one ever know? Of course he ought to. That's the reason, I suppose."

"He might marry Aunt Mary!"

"Your Aunt Mary! Ermyntrude, how can you talk such rubbish? Your Aunt Mary is one of the richest women in England, and she is to marry your cousin Birmingham as soon as she can. Everybody is moving heaven and earth to arrange that business, and I for one hope and pray it may succeed. There, I oughtn't to have told you. Are you ready? Do make haste." A moment later there were two splashes behind the yew-hedge, and Anthony crept swiftly away.

Once his eyes had been opened, it soon be-

came evident to Anthony that everybody was anxious to find him a wife. The matrimonial hunt was up, and, indeed, what more natural? He was little beyond forty, good-looking, rich in personal and social advantages. He had been married once before, and happily. He was just the kind of widower whose continued singleness every woman feels to be an insult and an injury to her, so numerous, sex. Time was hastening on. He still hung on that verge where those who had their reasons for doing so could speak of him as "a young man" without fear of open dissent.

He stopped at Stawell as long as he could, and "lay low." He possessed no female connections intimate enough to discuss the subject with him unasked; but for that circumstance, he would have found out long ago a great deal more than he knew. The only person who could have worried him—Lady Mary Hunt—was away in the States, where she had betaken herself for a five months' trip. "I

am curious to see for myself," she said, "whether the Americans can really outdo us, if they choose, in vulgarity. They always declare they can, but I won't believe till I've seen it. I don't believe, to begin with, that any one could be vulgarer than I and my set."

So she sailed away, in the deepest of sables, with a white poodle beside her, and a yellow French novel in her lap.

Anthony, back in London, and hard at work—in the horrible dull chambers he hated—was suddenly called down to Bournemouth, amongst December snows, by a telegram announcing the serious illness of Margie. The season was an exceptionally cold one. As he flew through the wintry landscape, in a terror of anxiety, he realised more than ever how his whole life—not the outer display of it, but the inner reality—was bound up in this daughter, the only living memorial of Margaret. After all, the things which occupy us every day are seldom the things we care for most.

He found Margie very ill with pneumonia, the crisis close at hand; her governess had waited too long before warning him. The doctor, vexatiously solemn, said, "Sir, I can say nothing," again and again. Anthony telegraphed for great men to London—not that he believed they could help him, but because he felt the powerlessness of all human help. He spent a week of immeasurable agony—he had not imagined it still possible to suffer so much—then the storm subsided, and in utter calm and weakness the beloved life drifted back into the haven.

As long as there was imminent danger he had hardly torn himself away from the bedside; now he managed to get across to Mrs. Fosby for a brief visit. The visit was not a success; in her confusion of Margarets, Mrs. Fosby went on maundering about sickness and death, until he could stand the tension no longer, and fled. "It's one of her bad days," said the old lady's much-worried companion.

"Sometimes she's quite bright and quick, for a while."

Anthony, stopping in the doorway, scanned the poor girl's worn, ladylike face. "And which do you prefer?" he asked kindly.

She turned away her eyes. "I take them as they come," she said.

It was on one of the bright days that he saw Mrs. Fosby again. Margie had very gradually recovered. Her father, unable to absent himself from London so long, had run down for occasional visits. The moment arrived, anxiously desired and dreaded, when he could come to fetch her away. Not to Stowell; the doctors had decreed that Margie must be taken south, to breathe the dust-laden winds of the sunny Riviera. She was to spend what was left of the winter with cousins of her mother's who had a villa at Cannes. So Anthony arranged to see her as far as Paris, and, being at Bournemouth, probably for the

last time in many months, he went to pay a farewell call on Mrs. Fosby.

“Anthony,” said the old lady, sitting up, “I am particularly glad to see you. There is an important matter concerning yourself which I am very anxious to discuss.” She shook out the lace at her wrists with a nervous quiver of her thin hands, and then searched in an absurd little old black reticule, which hung at her side. During this fumbling a cushion dropped from the back of her neck. It was, Anthony noticed, a wool-work cushion, much faded, with a hideous design of pink roses on red.

“Winifred!” said Mrs. Fosby, in her shrill voice, “my cushion has dropped again. You never can arrange it aright.” The companion rose meekly, and picked the thing up. “Now, don’t forget to dust it,” said Mrs. Fosby. “I can’t have all the dust off the carpet in my neck! Dust it! Dust it! And tell Mary to dust the carpets better, and to dust the chairs,

and dust the tables, and the—— Oh, dear, I forget the name for everything. It was my daughter's work, sir—I beg your pardon, Anthony—that cushion was. Here, let me dust it myself!" And she fell to with her pocket-handkerchief. In the middle of the dusting the cushion dropped again. "I'm a poor, tottery old woman," cried Mrs. Fosby, and began to shed tears. She grumbled then for several minutes, while Miss Gimpling was trying to satisfy her, and finally, having produced a letter from her bag, and laboriously polished her spectacles, she settled down to a careful perusal of the missive, cushion and cap on one side, in imminent danger of another catastrophe.

Anthony recognised, to his amazement and discomfort, on the envelope lying before him Lady Mary's sprawling handwriting. He averted his eyes; they fell on Winifred Gimpling's weary face, and wandered over the stupid, heavy furniture. A copy of the World

was lying on a table. That was Mrs. Fosby's worship of King Snob.

"Quite so," said Mrs. Fosby, folding up her letter—"Exactly." She took off her spectacles and peered at her son-in-law.

"Anthony," she said, "why don't you marry Lady Mary Dellys? I strongly advise you to marry Lady Mary Dellys."

Anthony Stollard was not a young man; he was, to a certain extent, a man of the world; he was a pale-faced man. He coloured crimson up to the roots of his hair. And he said, in a tone of the greatest annoyance:

"Pray let us speak of something else."

But Mrs. Fosby shook her head. "No, no," she said, "it is my duty to speak of *this*." And she struck a bony, much bejewelled forefinger on the letter lying before her. "What was I saying? Winifred, what was I saying?"

The companion looked up at Sir Anthony, with a glance of such sheer terror and appeal that he could not but laugh.

"I do not see anything to laugh at!" cried Mrs. Fosby in great irritation. "Pray, what is there to laugh at in an old woman, Sir Anthony Stollard, Baronet?"

"Indeed I was not laughing at you!" exclaimed Anthony, distressed.

"M. P.," said Mrs. Fosby.

"But at a—a coincidence. Margaret is much better; I shall be able to get her away next week."

"Margaret," echoed Mrs. Fosby, all the harshness gone from her face and voice. "Margaret! Yes, Anthony, you took her away and she never came back." Then followed a few moments of solemn silence. "But *this*," said Mrs. Fosby briskly, and crackled the paper, "this is what I wanted to talk about. Winifred, I'm very tired; why don't you give me my smelling-salts? Mark my birds, Anthony—words, I mean. You ought to marry Lady Mary Dellys. The county expects it of you—the county. There was some

talk some time ago, I remember, about your marrying her. You didn't; you preferred to marry Margaret. Margaret's where I shall soon be going." Mrs. Fosby began to whimper. "So now I agree with this"—she tapped the paper—"and with everybody, that you ought to marry Mary Dellys. I remember her well. A nice, bright, pheasant-spoken girl—peasant-spoken, I mean."

"Does that letter give the advice?" asked Anthony.

"Indeed it does. It says the whole county is agreed about the matter. And it tells me to make you do it."

"Oh, Mrs. Fosby, you shouldn't have said that!" cried the companion, starting up and scattering her sewing things on the floor.

"I am so much obliged to the county," remarked Anthony. But Mrs. Fosby's attention was concentrated on the one person she could still unrestricted bully.

“I will thank you to hold your tongue, Winifred Gimpling!” she screamed, “and not to insult people of my position by telling them what they are or are not to say! The society of Stawell, I presume, was superior to that of your father’s curacy at Pigseye.”

The companion gathered up her belongings without a word, and Anthony, forgetful of the reputation which was largely his own, gave his mother-in-law the curtest of good-byes and walked out of her house.

He was annoyed with the poor old creature, who, like most old ladies, was no better than she had been—rather worse, but he was far more angry at Lady Mary. He knew how reckless she could be in her downright speech, but what had she meant by going out of her way to write this outrageous letter from America? He was not sorry Mrs. Fosby had betrayed her. She deserved it.

A day or two later he took Margie as far as Paris. She was very quiet on the way and,

he thought, depressed. He spoke of her return in the spring, of the coming London season with all its glories. She answered little, in a subdued voice.

"I am afraid of it all, father," she said once, lying by their hotel window, from whence you could see the carriage-filled sweep of the Champs Elysées.

"Afraid of what?" he asked, bending over her. "Afraid of life, dear? All good people are, now and then. The only way is to walk straight up to it, look it in the face, and say, Oh, are you all? That is what philosophers call doing your duty. Ask no questions, but tell your story. I don't think there's a wiser rule." His own eyes grew dreamy, as he looked away, beyond the stream of human movement, into the still, pale sky.

Margie's hand stole to her father's and, clasping it, held it tight. Holding her father's hand! To her the action had in part a mystical meaning.

"It will all come right," she said presently. "We shall be very happy, father. I am sure we shall." * Her thoughts were full, now as constantly through these slow days of convalescence, full of all she would be for Anthony on her return to cheer his home. During forty-eight hours of her illness she had believed herself to be dying. She was not afraid to die—to go home to the God with whom her mother dwelt—but she had been loth, with many tears and pleadings, to leave the father whose lonely home had waited through all these years for her return. And she knew now that God had spared her to be his comfort for the past and, for the future, his delight. She was going to the Riviera now so as to gain strength for that great task. This "cure" would be their last long separation. She would go back, through the inevitable troubles of the London season, to *that*. They were made for each other, for each other only, united in their common

memory of the dear saint who had made them one.

“Oh, yes, it will all come right,” said Anthony.

CHAPTER XVI.

ON the last day of the old year Anthony arrived at Stawell. It was a dripping day, dark, full of dreariness and dull calm. He got into the brougham with a shiver; he had shivered in the train, although the damp air was far from cold. Through the gaunt trees ran a shiver also; it sent their shiny mist-drops down across the shiny road.

He sat alone with gloomy thoughts, of Margie gone away to Cannes, of the hideous northern winter all around him, of duty (with a slow internal yawn), of solitude, and loneliness, and damp. Presently the carriage drew swiftly near the side-road branching off to Thurdles. He put out his hand, almost involuntarily, to pull the check-string, to give an

order; he sank back, saying nothing, and sighed to himself.

In the house there were big fires and soft lights, a servants' welcome. He shut himself up in the library, had dinner served there, amongst all his books and papers, sat boring himself with statistics he didn't believe in, his mind occupied all the while by the talk of John Lumley's resignation, by the rumour which recommended him, Anthony Stollard, for the post.

Staring moodily into the red-hot embers, he once more asked himself the old, old question, if the whole thing was worth his while. Why not break away from it all, pick up Margie, and fly away to Italy, for good? His mind dwelt on the old life in Italy that had ended four years ago. All its sadness, all its sweetness came over him, like an odour of dead roses and pot-pourri. Why should any man sacrifice to an idea, to social position, social duty, social claims, the free develop-

ment of his own inner nature, that soul-life which, to some temperaments, remains in sorrow as well as in gladness the one joy of existence? Some men surely have a right—it is their duty—to suffer as they will. He paused.

“*If* I had had genius,” he said to himself in utter forlornness—*if*. The conclusion of the whole matter lies in that “*if*.” He shook himself, and lighted a particularly good cigar. “All *that* is over now,” he said, taking up “Figaro Noel.”

“Two ladies asking to see you, Sir Anthony,” said the butler, in the dim doorway. Before another word could be spoken the two ladies were crossing the room.

“What a strange reception!” cried Lady Mary Hunt. “But of course you did not get my telegram! I telegraphed to your London address, asking whether you could have us down here for a day or two. And as you didn’t answer, I came.”

"You are very welcome: I need hardly say that," replied Anthony, with slight hesitation. He glanced away to the figure in the background. "I had thought you were still in America."

"This is Mary Dellys, my niece. I am not sure if you are acquainted." (Which last was a fib.) "Fowey's eldest daughter, you know."

"It is exceedingly kind of you to look me up," said Anthony. He noticed, as he shook hands, that Lady Mary's companion was unusually pretty. "Now what can I do for you, or get for you, first?"

"Pay the fly," replied Lady Mary promptly. "Dear me, it's actually past ten o'clock. We had some dinner—and very bad it was—at Trapping Junction. I want you to give us a hot supper, a regular make-a-night-of-it supper, as near the New Year as you can manage it. I want to have roast chestnuts, please. I got into Liverpool the day before yesterday; so you see I've lost no time in coming to you."

Anthony went to give the necessary orders, that his guests might be as comfortable as he could make them. He was not going to analyse Lady Mary's manner of doing things; her appearance at this moment, with a probably agreeable companion, caused him almost extravagant pleasure. When he returned to the library, he found the elder lady comfortably ensconced by the fire.

"I drove to your chambers," said Lady Mary, "but the woman said you had left for here. That suited me exactly. So I just stopped to pick up poor Mary, and brought her away with me. Don't you think she's exceedingly pretty?"

"Where is she?" asked Anthony.

"She has gone to lie down a bit, so as to be in trim for my midnight supper. But you don't answer my question."

"All women are pretty," replied Anthony; "even those who are only pretty old." He felt quite light-hearted, equal to making puns.

Lady Mary laughed. "That isn't bad," she said; "but it's not good enough for an Under Secretary of State. You have the news already, haven't you?"

"Nothing," began Anthony, "beyond——"

She clapped her hands. "Then it's *my* news," she cried. "I'm so glad; I had hoped it would be. I picked it up this afternoon from—never mind from whom. It's true. John Lumley has resigned, dead-beat, and you are to take his place. Of course you will accept: what else have you been working for, these five years?"

"I'm sure I don't know," replied Anthony, bewildered, staring into the fire.

"I should think not. Well, Anthony, I want you to be very pleased about this appointment, as pleased as all your friends are. I'm so glad I had the telling of the news. That's worth a bad dinner at Trapping."

"You are very good," murmured Anthony, still collecting his thoughts.

"What a horrid thing to say! But seriously, this appointment marks what Mrs. Fosby called when I went to see her before leaving—we were speaking of Margie—a peacock in your career! It's the landing, so to speak, after the first flight of stairs! How does Tennyson put it?—'That men may rise o'er stepping stones——' "

"Don't, please!" he exclaimed. "That isn't apposite a bit!"

"Well, I don't pretend," she answered good-humouredly, "to know anything of poetry." She shifted her neatly slippered feet in front of the blazing logs. "I don't know more than half-a-dozen lines of Tennyson, and I'm not sure how many of those are Brownings. 'Tis better to have loved and lost,' for instance." She stopped, blushing slightly. *That* quotation was perhaps too apposite. "How is Margie?" she said. "Laying

in a store of strength, I hope, for the coming season. By the bye, Anthony"—this with an air of affected carelessness—"who is going to present her, when the time comes?"

"My cousin Dartry, I suppose," replied Anthony. "She's got no nearer relation."

"Poor little Margie," said Lady Mary, musing. "But perhaps she isn't little at all?"

"She is far from tall. And she is—I imagine—rather unformed."

"She was a dear child when I saw her last, simple and kind-hearted, and pleasant to look at: just the sort of child that any father ought to be fond of, and proud of, and very especially good to."

"I am all that," replied Anthony softly, "and a good deal more. But—well, let us talk of something else."

"You will want to be still more in London now: you ought almost to have a house there."

“What should I do with a house? I can’t entertain.”

“You might in a way—you might—but no, that would be unsatisfactory. Anthony, I want you to marry Lady Mary Dellys.”

For a moment the confusion of names, the reminiscences of Mrs. Fosby, disconcerted him even more than the proposition itself. Lady Mary went on talking.

“That’s why I brought her here, in fact. Of course she doesn’t know. Or rather, I carried her off from the tender mercies of her family.”

“Lady Fowey——?” began Anthony.

“Lady Fowey is a sweet nonentity, and does her children as much harm as only sweet mothers can. But my aunt of Birmingham manages us all. I don’t think you ever met her. She is a Cerodac, one of the few great ladies left in the country. It’s a good thing they are dying out, the great ladies. They

were the cruelest creation of God upon earth."

Anthony smiled. "And for her punishment she is called Birmingham," continued Lady Mary. "She wants poor Mary to marry Sir Lancelot Colquhoun—all of them do, more or less. Colquhoun and Colquhoun, you know, the great sausage-shop people—Lazarus Cohen the name was twenty years ago. But I say there must be limits"—Lady Mary set her shapely teeth hard—"and I have more right to speak than any of them. The measure of the sacrifice must be proportioned to the measure of the need. And Fowey can at least pay instalments on his debts."

Anthony smiled again. "The Duchess wouldn't consider me much of a match," he said.

"You'd do," replied Lady Mary coolly. "She'd discount you. There's the sausages, you see, and the Cohen connection. Besides, I don't see why I shouldn't have a word to say

in the matter. Before I went to America I'd never thought about it. But as soon as it occurred to me, I wrote to Mrs. Fosby. I am glad to say she heartily approves."

Anthony knew not whether to laugh or frown. He was certainly glad to find that he had misunderstood Mrs. Fosby's allusions to "Lady Mary Dellys," and that the fair widow before him had not openly proposed herself as a candidate for his hand. Nevertheless, he also felt himself disappointed, for reasons he comprehended, though he would have found them hard to explain.

"You don't expect me, surely," he said with a little irritation, "to await Mrs. Fosby's approval?"

"I was thinking of Margie," she answered calmly.

The words struck him like a blast of ice. He said nothing more for a long time.

"Of course you need do nothing in a hurry," she remarked presently, wearying of the

silence, a thing she always disliked. "Just watch her and get acquainted. I am sure you will like her. She is very unsophisticated. I have told her I shall give her a dowry, whoever she marries. So you see, to a certain extent, she is free in her choice."

"Oh, yes, I forgot," said Anthony. "Of course you are enormously rich." Perhaps he had forgotten at that moment, but he had often enough reflected on the fact.

Lady Mary looked uncomfortable. "Not so enormously," she answered; then fearing he should presume some affectation on her part: "Perhaps you haven't heard?" she continued. "I—I didn't keep all that money, Anthony."

"I have heard nothing about it," replied Anthony, bending forward with much interest.

"Oh, it's very simple. There were two wills, one before Eveline's marriage and one after. I carried out some of the provisions of the first."

"You gave the money to Eveline!" cried Anthony.

"Not exactly. Her husband has turned out better than we feared. He is a mediocre artist, but he treats her decently. They still live in Florence. I don't quite see why the marriage should have made all that difference in her father's plans."

"You carried out the original will!" insisted Anthony.

"I have seven thousand a year," replied Lady Mary. "That seems amply sufficient. Can you imagine what Eveline is doing with her money? Building magnificent free hotels for art students in half-a-dozen places at once. At least, that is her project. You will see all about it soon enough in the papers. She was always half crazy, but rather attractively so."

"Lady Mary," said Anthony with fervour, "how much better you are than you try to make yourself."

"Out?"

"No, I did not say 'out.' You are a good woman. Surely your step-daughter admits as much now?"

"I don't know; it is too late. You see, she started wrong. Start right with Margie. What you say about her makes me anxious. This is a worldly world we live in, and unworldliness, like other-worldliness, doesn't pay. Mary Dellys will be a great help to Margie—like an older, wiser sister. She is really a good girl, is Mary. Very much like what I was fifteen years ago!"

"Not so handsome," said Anthony.

"Nobody ever knows," replied Lady Mary rather sadly, "how handsome a woman *was*."

"Mary," he said, "will you marry a man whose heart——"

"No," she interrupted him hastily, "I won't hear anything about Edward Gray."

His face grew dark with annoyance, but before he could speak another word:

"I know exactly what your heart is like," she said; "it is in very good condition. It is a first-rate heart. And I advise you to make a present of it to a younger woman than I am."

"You wrong me," he answered. "I was not going to talk rubbish about Edward Gray. But I have loved once as I shall never love again. I cannot 'love,' in the old sense, the lady who consents to gladden my home and to befriend my daughter. You say that you know my heart. Such as it is, if you will have it, it is yours."

Lady Mary sat gazing straight in front of her.

"To me," she said at last, "the whole thing seems unfair—unfair to yourself and to the name you are bearer of. I am nearly forty, Anthony."

"And I—do you think I am young?—a young woman's husband—I?"

Again a long silence fell between them, the

longest silence in Lady Mary's life. When she spoke it was to say:

“If you really will have me, to be what little I can for you and for Margie, I will gratefully, faithfully, endeavour to do my best. I will do all I can for Margie. Anthony, I—I am not sentimental—am I?—but I have loved you all my life.”

CHAPTER XVII.

WHEN Lady Mary Dellys entered the library half an hour later she found her god-mother, who apparently had not moved all the while, engaged in very serious conversation with their host. The little party went into supper immediately, and the ladies especially were exceedingly gay over this unconventional entertainment.

“Anthony, before the clock strikes I expect a speech and a toast,” said Lady Mary Hunt. “My dear Mary, you must wish all possible prosperity to this Government functionary, who will some day be in the Cabinet.”

“Are under-secretaries in the Cabinet?” asked Lady Mary Dellys innocently. Her aunt felt somewhat reassured. After all, perhaps, an older and more experienced wife

would not be the worse match for Sir Anthony Stollard.

“Lady Mary has possibly a toast of her own?” said Anthony gallantly. A sparkle of mischief came into the girl’s good-natured blue eyes.

“Yes, indeed,” she said. “I drink to the duke’s future bride, Aunt Mary. May she sit at the head of his table before the new year has grown old.”

“And may we be there to see,” said Lady Mary imperturbably. “She means Birmingham, Anthony. I ran away from him to America, and he stupidly pursued me. The duchess was terrible. I really am afraid I should have been compelled to marry him—and I’m a good plucked one, as you know—I *had* to arrange about the will, as my only escape. It was very funny; I wish you could have seen it. They dropped off, all at once, quite silent and dead, like dogs when the last biscuit’s eaten. I hadn’t the remotest

desire to become Duchess of Birmingham."

"It must be rather a nice thing to be a duchess," said Lady Mary Dellys.

"Not of Birmingham, my dear. And that is what all our duchesses are now-a-days. Anthony, I want some more of those red-hot chestnuts. Mary, I invite you to supper next year—you have no objection, Anthony?—with Lady Mary Stollard."

"Good heavens, is that how you keep secrets?" exclaimed Anthony.

"Not from this child. She shall be my one exception. My dear Mary, this engagement must be mentioned to no one till Sir Anthony has returned with his daughter from Cannes."

To the astonishment of both her companions Lady Mary Dellys burst into tears, of which she refused to give any explanation. She rose from the table and hurried away. Her aunt hastened after her.

“My dear child!” cried Lady Mary, half laughing, “you didn’t know him before this evening! You surely didn’t want to marry him yourself?”

“No,” sobbed the younger Lady Mary, almost laughing also; “but—but—oh, everybody seems so happy except me!”

“Tell me, who is it?” whispered the older woman in the dark of the ante-room. And, as no answer was forthcoming, “Make haste, my dear, before that fat butler comes in.”

“It’s Hugh Brassell,” sobbed the damsel.

“What, handsome Hugh Brassell of the Guards? You sly little puss, you shall have him—that’s to say, if he wants you.”

“Oh, Aunt Mary, of course he wants me. I mean to say, how could I want him, if he didn’t? How should I know anything about it?” And Mary Dellys hid her face in her handkerchief.

“You shall have him. You know, I have promised you a dowry. I’ll make it enough

for you to marry on. You're my godchild. They won't dare refuse me." The great hall clock began to chime. "Come back to the library, quick, child. Anthony, here are two engagements to celebrate!"

"Hush, aunt, I entreat of you—hush!" implored the young Lady Mary.

The older woman, the widow, obeyed. For some moments her thoughts had dwelt on her own girlhood and early marriage; now they flew away to Eveline, away yonder in Florence, childless, with a life-mate who could never be anything more than a disappointment. "God bless this house," she said solemnly, "and all who dwell in it. God bless Margie, all alone, far away!"

"Thank you," answered Anthony heartily, with uplifted glass. "And here's the health of all lovers!" he added, as if it were an after-thought.

"And may they all get the desire of their heart," said Lady Mary Hunt.

“Before they grow too old to enjoy it,” said stupid little Mary Dellys, smiling like an April day.

Next morning the weather had changed. The new year opened faint and tepid, under a pale blue sky. Church being over, and luncheon eaten, Lady Mary Hunt stopped yawning in the picture gallery, sat up briskly, and demanded to be taken for a drive. Her niece, wisely and sweetly, had letters to write—one letter, at any rate—and so the engaged couple started together in the phaeton.

“Will you drive?” asked Anthony, holding out the reins. Lady Mary declined, and took her seat, chuckling to herself over some thoughts of her own.

When she broke the silence, it was to say: “Anthony, I wish you would take me to Thurldes.” He clenched his hands on the ribbons so tight that the sensitive horses sprang forward; they had flown on some yards

along the slushy road before Anthony said:
“Why?”

“Because I should like to see it. Because I think I ought to see it. Because we should have some things in common—as far as possible—no farther.”

“Perhaps you are right,” he answered quietly, and he turned the horses’ heads.

“You know the house—surely?” he said, as the white building came into sight between the trees.

“From the outside only.”

“It isn’t much of a house to look at.”

She laid a hand on his arm: “You don’t mind, do you?” she said.

“No, indeed,” he answered hastily. “I don’t mind anything. I mean, why should you think I minded? As you say, we have everything in common now.”

“I did not say that, nor anything like it.” Her voice showed she was hurt. “What a beautiful pale blue sky—almost like Flor-

ence. Would you like to live in Florence again? ”

“ Would you? ”

“ No. I should prefer Monte Carlo.”

“ Well, there’s not much chance of either for me. I had a telegram this morning; it bears out your information. I must be off to London to-morrow.”

“ So I understood. That is why I asked you to drive me here to-day.” She alighted as she spoke. They walked along the front of the house, round by the boudoir window, to whose parapet Margie had so often clung. “ It looks very deserted,” said Lady Mary. “ Naturally it would,” replied her companion; “ nobody ever comes here but I.”

They wandered through the rooms, she saying very little, he reflecting how clever she was, to have brought him here at once in this manner. She was “ getting it over,” as he understood. And really the little she said from time to time—for under no circum-

stances could she keep silence long—was in admirable taste. Perhaps he had hardly given her credit for her full share of tact: perhaps he had hardly realised what kind of insolence is tact consummate. There is nothing a man likes better in a woman, except physical attraction, than neatness of hand and of heart.

They paused before the one room which she had left unmentioned, and he unlocked the door.

“And this room,” she said looking round, “is sacred to her memory. That is as it should be, Anthony.”

“It shall always remain so,” he answered. She bent over a magazine lying on a side table. A number of “Fraser’s,” nine years old. The pale light crept from the bow-window across the wall opposite. “Oh, what a picture!” she cried.

She was standing, astonished, before “The Angel of Human Love.” It loomed from its

dark background, white and pure, with that almost awful actuality which seems to breathe from a great painting of the human face when you come upon it unexpectedly in a solitude. The eyes, in their sweet sadness, were gazing full at the two who stood before them. "Anthony!" cried Lady Mary, "who painted that?"

"It is the last work I ever did," replied Anthony. "I finished it five years ago."

"You! You!" her voice, trembling with amazement, fell to a sudden hush. "You painted *that*?" She remained motionless before the picture: he, standing a little behind her, knew not whether to feel pleased or vexed. Her presence in that room, her voice on its stillness, her study of the portrait, these things were to him as a physical pain.

"That is a great picture," said Lady Mary. "Surely others—better judges—have said as much?"

"You are the third person that has ever

seen it," he answered. "The others are Margie and I."

"And you say you have never painted anything since?"

"I have not. It didn't seem worth while."

"Not worth while? The man who could paint that picture ought never to have done anything but paint!"

He cried out at the cruel words, struck as if with a knife. "You don't mean that, Mary! You can't mean that! It's against all your traditions and teaching of common sense!"

"No, I don't mean it," she said soothingly, with ready woman's wit. "But you oughtn't quite to have abandoned painting. You must take it up again in your spare moments."

He grew paler still, at the thought of painting in his spare moments. "Come, let us go," he said. His face was drawn with pain: he could stand the tension no longer.

The eyes of his dead wife were looking at him, full of pity, full of pity.

"I can hear the horses outside," he said. "They are exceedingly restless. We had better make haste."

On the way home Lady Mary talked of plans for the new life in London, of possible situations for a residence, of servants, and even casually of the conventional restrictions imposed by her period of mourning.

"The engagement cannot possibly be announced for the next month or two," she said. "In any case, people will talk."

Lady Mary smiled. "Because of seventeen years ago," she said, "and because they always do. And because we have given them plenty of occasion—recently. And because they would, though we had not."

Anthony frowned. He did not like the idea of people talking about these affairs of his. Seventeen years ago he was not a public man. Away at Florence, he had not

mind what people said. Now, in his altered circumstances, he felt that his public life was public property. Surely that was enough.

"Everybody will discuss us," continued Lady Mary Hunt; "from my aunt of Birmingham down to—down to the buyers of the penny society papers. I wonder what sort of people those are? I should like to meet one; just as the Princess Pobolski, who had known hundreds of English abroad, said she hoped, when she came to London, she should meet a Home Ruler.

"I don't quite see the connection," said Anthony carelessly.

"My dear Anthony, I am not algebra. If you expect me to talk like a—what do you call it?—a theorem, you will be immensely disappointed. If there is anything Euclidian in my conversation, it must be the reduction to the absurd."

She went on talking for the sake of talking, distressed by his white face, the set look

in his eyes, the grave indifference of his manner. She believed that if he was now suffering thus keenly, the entire cause must be sought in the visit to Thurdles which she had suggested, and the thought was a great humiliation to her. Certainly she was not prepared for the suddenness with which he turned to her at last.

“You are partial,” he said, “about that picture.”

“Ask whom you like,” she answered heartily. “It is a masterpiece. You must send it to the Symbolists’ next month.”

He drove on so fast that, in spite of her traditional courage, she could not resist convulsively clasping the side of the seat.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Two months later, not one month—Lady Mary's dates were generally wrong—the “Angel of Human Love” was sent in, anonymously, to the Easter Exhibition of the Symbolists in the Champs Elysées. Anthony had not intended to send it, which fact is a fresh proof of the very old truth that, when woman proposes, she generally disposes too.

Shortly after the picture had been accepted, its author, availing himself of the recess, started southward to spend a few days with his daughter. At Paris he naturally delayed twenty-four hours to inspect the Exhibition. Short as his holiday was, and fondly as his heart yearned after the child, he could not but dread the disclosure of his plans for the future—her future, although he had resolved

from the first that the news should be withheld till she heard it from his lips. The more he reflected on former conversations with Margie, the surer he felt that he was acting for her happiness. "Make her happy." These words had been a law to him since first he read them. "Make her happy and good." She had needed no making good. All that was compatible with his highest duty he had done for her, and now at this critical moment—never could he recall, without an inward shudder, the arrival of Eveline Hunt in Florence—at this critical moment he was doing almost more.

So he reasoned, for the hundredth time, as he sat over his coffee after luncheon on the boulevard. Years ago, Lady Mary's warnings about nestless fledglings had frightened and greatly influenced him. In Margie's development, on her return to England, and especially of late on leaving school, he had seen the wise woman's contentions come true.

There were many things to be considered in his life, perhaps; there were few, it seemed to him, still worth considering. The great thing is to see what is most important, and to put it first.

He walked across to the kiosk, and bought a couple of daily papers. He had only got into Paris that morning.

Almost the first thing to strike his eye in the *Figaro*—after the *Nouvelles à la Main*, which everyone naturally picks out—was a notice of the recently-opened exhibition, containing half a column of unusually enthusiastic praise. And the picture thus selected was not by one of the numerous dear *confrères, collaborateurs* or *concitoyens*, to whom French journals so easily address their compliments; it was the anonymous English painting, sent in under the appellation, “The Angel of Human Love.”

He took up the serious *Temps*, with fairly steady hand, and again the name of his pic-

ture stared him in the face. "It is the greatest picture," said the Temps, "that Paris has seen for several seasons. It reveals a new genius in the world of painting. We welcome him, although he be not a Frenchman. The Republic of Art recognises no frontiers, etc., etc." And the article was signed Maurice Rodillet!

He rose to his feet a little dazed, and walked through the unresting crowd. The constant going and coming troubled him. He was glad to get away to the larger spaces, among the barren trees.

There was nothing like a crush inside the Exhibition building; scattered spectators formed lively groups of two and three. In the second room alone a larger group had gathered, buzzing with that stupidly important interest which accumulates around the ignorant sensation of the hour.

There, stared at by twenty unsympathetic faces—fat, fair, old, foolish, simpering, bored

—there, staring back at them, sweetly, serenely unconscious, was the face of his solitude, his sanctitude, his dream of life and death. He gazed, on the outskirts of the crowd, until there seemed to come into those constant eyes a look of soft reproach and pleading. He tore himself away.

On a bench by the swiftly-flowing river he sat until the evening fell, and watched the river flow.

At the restaurant where he dined, a couple of journalists were talking of the picture. Curiosity was rife, he heard them say, as to who would claim the work. "A young man, of course," said one of the diners; "he will do great things." "A young man?" echoed his companion. "I have my doubts. But yes, he will do great things."

The station of the Boulevard Diderot was full of very different preoccupations. In the turmoil of English people going south the anonymous celebrity once

more felt himself secure. "That's Sir Anthony Stollard," somebody whispered, "the Under-Secretary——" He moved away.

But he could not escape the conversation which reached him from the neighbouring compartment of the corridor train—

"Owner of Stawell, by Jove—forty something, not five—and such a position in Parliament! Lucky fellow! Do you believe there is anything in the story of a *liaison* with Lady Mary Midas?"

"I always believe, on principle, the story of a *liaison*. Besides, why not? He's been a widower for ages; men don't go on mourning for their wives till they marry again. And surely, Lady Mary can't have doted on Midas. By-the-bye, she's been giving her millions away."

"Yes. Rum go. What fools women are!"

"And to that painter chap, of all crea-

tures! It was awfully hard on Midas, his daughter marrying a painter chap!"

Sir Anthony Stollard sat still in his compartment. Well, he was a statesman. Great God! he might have been—he might have been—a painter chap!

"Margie, you are looking very much better!" were his first words, as he alighted at the little Cannes station. There was a cry of joy in them. "Really very much better," he said.

"So I wrote, papa, in every letter."

"Yes; but one likes to make sure of the thing for one's self. I can't wait half-an-hour for my luggage. Let us drive up at once to the hotel."

During the drive—during the ensuing dinner at the Villa Liseron, where Margie was staying—he talked of an hundred subjects—pets, acquaintances, dependents; but he knew that presently, before they parted for the night, he must speak of the one thing which occupied his thoughts.

He did not imagine he should find it very difficult. Of course, in such matters, there is always the newness, and the absurdity, of the situation to get over. But Margie's heart would doubtless leap up for joy at thought of the responsibility, the timidity, rolled away from it, like a stone. She would enter the great world she dreaded, under Lady Mary's experienced guidance. Joyous and careless, as a young girl should be, in London, at Stawell, she would live the same bright life as the friends she had frequently envied, and, in time, she would marry happily. God bless her! He could never have arranged about her marriage. Often he had trembled at the thought.

He did not fear that she would dislike to see a stranger in her mother's place. She had forgotten her mother. If there was one thing in which she had disappointed his constant affection, it was her easy attainment of that indifference he had so ardently desired. For years she had never mentioned the deceased;

she had never again asked to see the picture at Thurdles. When she complained, it was not that she regretted a loss, but a want.

“Margie,” he said ; his voice quivered slightly. They were out on the terrace of the villa, in the perfumed evening air.

“Margie.” A little breeze cast shadows of black foliage across the twinkling stars. The sea lay in the distance, a silent mass of gloom. “I have got something to tell you. On the whole, I think you will like it, at least, after a while.”

“If you have arranged it for me, father, I am sure I shall like it,” she answered. She was standing close against him, with her hands clasped on his shoulder, and she pressed them as she spoke.

“In a few weeks, when the weather is definitely milder, you will be coming home—definitely, too. You are going to be a grown-up young lady now, Margaret. You remember you used to be so afraid of the idea?”

“Yes,” she answered; but there was more than affirmation in her reply. He hesitated.

“But I have had plenty of time to think about it all,” she continued, “and I think I have got a little more sensible, father. I feel that I have been rather foolish and—and distrustful of God’s help. I have been waiting to say this to you till you came. I couldn’t write it. I am going to be your own brave daughter, and make your home happy for you, and comfortable, as far as I can. I am going to do my duty, to follow the example you have set me, dear father, through all these years.” Very quietly she unclasped her hands, threw one arm round his neck, and kissed him.

“I can never repay all you have done for me,” she said, “but I’ll try to do all I can.”

In the silence, the heavy, living silence, she stood patiently waiting, with her arm round his neck.

“Are we going to live part of the year in

London?" she asked at last. "I expected it would have to be that, now. I am sure I shall get accustomed to London, and—and like parties, especially now. I am so proud of you, father; everyone sings your praises, though I don't need that. I was rude to Mrs. Gleeson the other day, I fear, because she said it was so extraordinary; nobody had ever thought formerly you could do anything but paint! 'Just do nice little amateur pictures,' she said. She had never seen the—the portrait of"—Margaret's voice dropped very low—"my mother."

"Just so," he said quickly, "we shall have to live in London now during the season. You could never have undertaken the responsibility of a London house—of fashionable entertainments. It would have worn you out, dear; you have no idea what it means. I have found somebody to help us with it all, Margie, somebody who will be an immense comfort to you, and make everything smooth. I have asked

Lady Mary Hunt to marry me and she has consented."

Again the silence, the heavy, living silence. She stood with her arm round his neck; he felt the arm tremble; that was all.

"I am glad," she said at last.

"I thought you would be, dear. I knew it. I—— For we—— Things turn out so differently in life from what one expects." He hardly knew why he said that; he was thinking of his own crushed ideal, the thing that might have been!—that might have been!—and never would be now. "The only happiness left on earth is common sense—to take life as it comes, and do one's best. You are so sensible, Margie; I can't think, as I've often said, from where you get your delightful, helpful common sense. From your mother, to a certain extent. But your mother was more—how shall I call it?—sentimental."

"Perhaps," said Margaret. "Papa, I should like to sit down."

She slowly withdrew her arm. He knew not whether to be fully pleased or slightly vexed by her calm satisfaction. He had judged her character rightly. He was slightly vexed.

He went after her, folded her in his arms, and repeatedly kissed her. "Dearest," he said, "you have always been, through all these desolate years—you will always be in the future—the light of my eyes, and the joy of my heart. My own dear daughter—mother's daughter! My comfort, my hope!" He turned hastily, then pausing. "Yes," he said, "her petition is answered. You are happy and good."

And he left her.

She sat on the seat staring far into the darkness towards the sea that lay distant, a dull mass of gloom. A little breeze cast shadows of black foliage across the twinkling stars above her. From behind the silent water, heavy clouds were creeping up.

“To be happy and good?” she repeated aloud. Her head sank on her hands. “Oh, Father in Heaven—mother’s God! my God! —make me good!”

THE END.

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